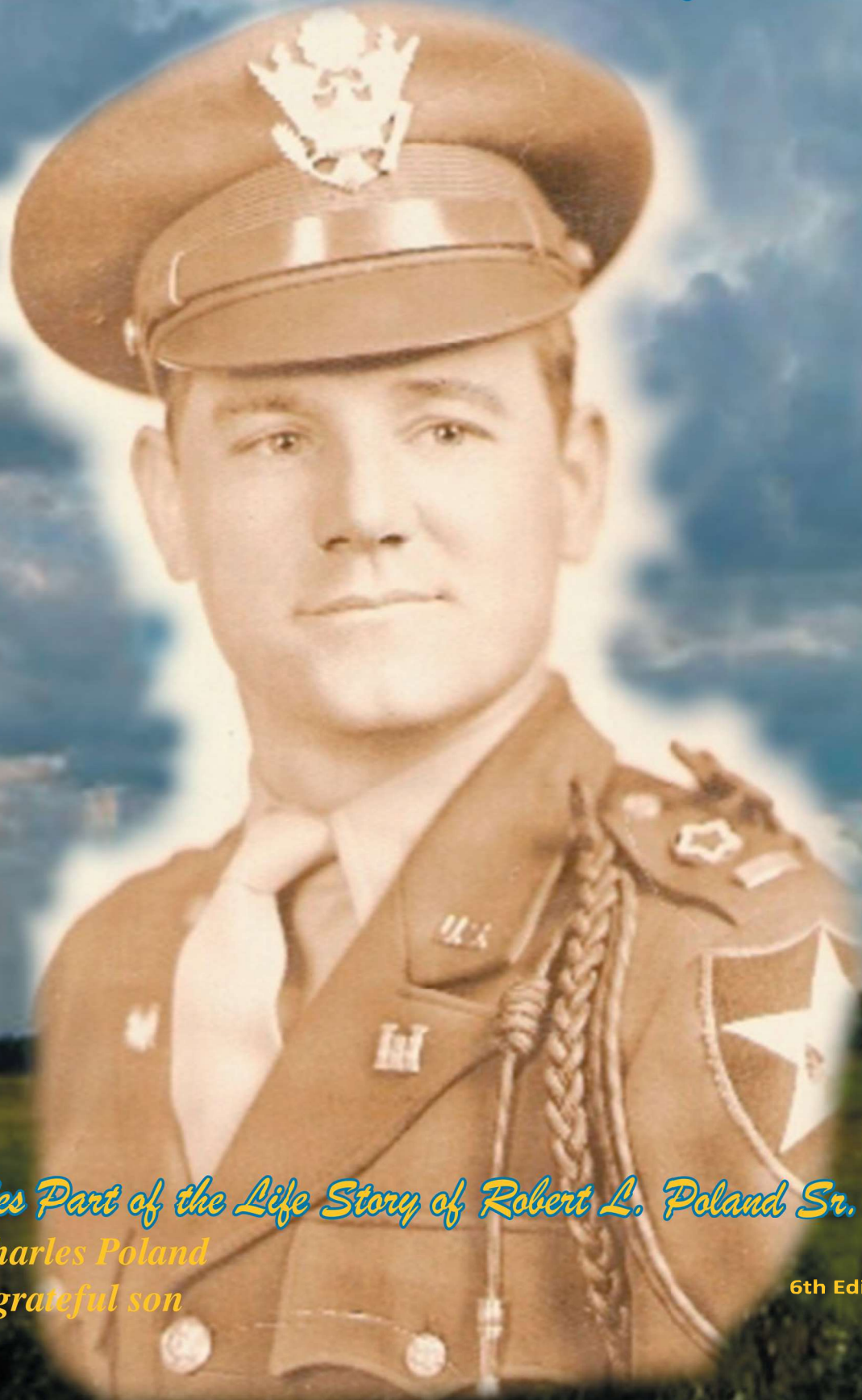


# *A Man From the Prairie The Greatest Generation and The Holocaust of War*



*Includes Part of the Life Story of Robert L. Poland Sr.*  
*By: Charles Poland*  
*a grateful son*

6th Edition

A Man From The Prairie  
The Greatest Generation  
And the Holocaust of War



## Dedication

To my Father, Robert L. Poland, Sr., who lived through the fire and storm of war, and to my sister, Joy Dell Prendergast. Along with my Mother, the three most caring, kind, giving, forgiving, considerate, loving, and fun people I have ever known. To Robert L. Poland, Jr., a generous and caring person, to him and his fellow soldiers, who had their own war to fight for our freedom just as my Father did. And to John Slover Poland, of tremendous character and personality, who was taken far too soon. God blessed me far beyond measure with them in my life here.

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## Introduction

This book is to honor my Father, Robert L. Poland, Sr., my Mother Adell Slover Poland, and all the men and women of the generation who grew up from the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, endured the Great Depression, and fought and won the world wide conflagration known as World War II. Theirs was a generation of no excuses, who lived hardships as part of daily life most of us here in the United States wouldn't imagine enduring, and forged a growing nation into a world military, economic, and political power. Freedom doesn't come cheap. It continues to be bought today on sharp, brutal battlefields against ruthless enemies often fanatic with their beliefs that ignore the commonality, rights, and compassion all men and women should expect and receive from each other. No different when Pop and his fellow soldiers stepped into the hailstorm of killing fields far away from the peace and civil lives they would have been leading in the United States. They each deserve their experience chronicled in detail for the world to read.

I have always been in awe of my Father and his abilities, and that of his generation. Part of it may be the child in awe of an adult perspective, but to me they always exhibit a quiet, solid, competence, and the discipline to do what needs to be done when it needs doing. Also to me, as individuals and a group, they have always continuously exhibited the epitome of what it means to be gentlemen and ladies.

Please forgive the quality of many of the pictures. The archives and sources have to be acquired wherever they can be found. I am especially grateful to Mike Snetzer, who served in the Special Forces in Vietnam, who loaned me his Father's, Lt. Col. Snetzer's Diary, a clear account of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion's path through the war. Also I am very grateful to Fred Valentino, who served alongside Dad as a Captain in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Combat Engineer Battalion for his loan of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion history account. My sister, Joy Dell Prendergast helped greatly with many pictures and editing, as did two different, invaluable assistants, Angie Durham and Bridgette Stephenson.

Besides the many reference materials and books, I drew a lot in this new, expanded edition on three books that outline in detail the horrific, daily lives endured by so many during the historic event called The Holocaust. Three books in particular are "Born Survivors" by renowned author Wendy Holden, "All But My Life" by Gerda Weiss Klein, and "Eyewitness Auschwitz" by Filip Muller. Gerda and Filip lived this historic horror and Wendy chronicled in great detailed research the lives of three women from the beginning to the end of their experience in this historical devastation of human lives. I also in July 2018 was privileged to interview survivor Martin Weiss, who lived through it.

Besides the way of life in the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the main thing I am trying to convey is the brutal firestorm my Father's generation went through to finish what had to be finished, to literally save the world from a tyranny that had absolutely no compassion for anyone's rights or lives; but was only concerned with an insatiable quest for mortal power over others. I wanted to show clearly why the Nazi regime, the Axis Powers had to be stopped and that great sacrifices had to be made in order to stop them. In this edition I included first hand accounts of the Holocaust, plus additional military operations. Such a danger had to be conquered by battle, and such dangers unfortunately persist in various forms in the world of today. May God give this planet the peace that surpasses all understanding, and allow all who have fought for the rights of others while risking their lives and often giving their lives, access to this divine peace and love, forever.

## Chapter One

A beautiful Spring day of 1971 found Dad and I attending all day singing and dinner on the grounds at Shawnee Prairie Baptist Church, on Shawnee Prairie in East Texas. The Prairie is about eighteen miles southeast of Lufkin, Texas, and four miles from the old Manning town site.

Since I loved live singing, loved the area and its people, and especially eating like a starving hog, it was a great day. East Texas country folk were renowned for their home grown, home cooked food. I was there for the gospel singing too.

We walked up to the front of the old church Pop had attended as a boy when he lived on a farm here on the Prairie. That was farming done with a plow pulled behind mules. Hard days, hard work.

The front overhang of the church was supported by old red brick columns. All the walls were of historic, wooden, ship lap construction, painted white inside and out. A few large, tall pines trees surrounded and shaded the building. The fields of Shawnee Prairie which around for miles grew trees, hay and cattle; were once filled with rows of cotton, corn, peanuts and people walking behind a plow. Pop walked up greeting people, relatives, old friends.

The church roof in the front overhung bare dirt and sparse grass as we walked up wooden stairs and into the sanctuary. Across the farm to market road FM 844, that ran in front of the church, were some old familiar buildings in the process of slowly falling down.

The largest structure across the road, on the edge of a large field, had been the cotton gin for the area, with a general store on the north side of it. Pop had worked at the gin one summer there in the late -1930s during the Great Depression. He ran the large powerful suction pipe that pulled the cotton out of the wagons brought heaping into the gin for the cotton to be processed.

Weighing one hundred and thirty pounds soaking wet, he spent all day in the baking hot summer walking over the hand picked cotton brought by wagons, stomping through its sinking surface, wrestling the huge pipe as it sucked the white fiber into the bowels of the gin to be separated of its seeds, cleaned, and tightly packed into five hundred pound bales. I remember meeting a man once who had a finger pulled off while working at such a job.



These bales were taken by train to Houston to be shipped all over the world. The work was baking hot, the air filled with dust, and the constant stomping through the soft cotton loads was a strenuous workout all day on his legs. Constantly wrestling and lifting the heavy pipe was brutal.

The work went on all day, from dawn to dark. At the end of the week Pop's pay all went to his Father. It all went to Papaw, as we called our grandfather, to help support the family in those days.

In the pasture over from the church, Pop went to a two room school during the fourth through the seventh grade. He, his brother and sisters would walk about a mile from their home out on the Prairie. He didn't wear shoes much until the last year in high school, the eleventh grade. He would break ice on water puddles with his feet during the winter. After years of going without shoes his feet were as tough as hard leather. He said he could run through a patch of grass burrs and never flinch. I remember getting them stuck in my feet when I was a kid growing up here on the Prairie and they hurt like hell. Most were small, green thorny balls. Some were purple like burnished steel with barbs just as sharp.

Another building at the end of the gin was a general store. Flourney's store. When I was growing up on the Prairie in the 1950s and early '60s we had a herd of cattle. In summers we'd bale hay from our pastures to feed the cattle during winter. Sometimes during the terribly hot summers toward the middle of an afternoon of baling hay, Pop would take us to Flourney's store for a cold drink. They had an ice box that held the coldest bottled sodas. I always got a Mack's Strawberry Soda, but have never seen one since. Being hot, totally dry, and sweaty, it didn't last more than a couple of gulps. One was all we'd get, moreover all we really could afford. Of course we had water, warm or hot water in a container on the truck, but I've never forgotten how good those few cold swallows of that Soda tasted. They were tastes from heaven.

Soon, that day in '71, we were walking up into the large, open area of the church sanctuary with its rows of old wooden pews filled with people raising their voices to God and the exposed rafters above. Up front the hymn leaders waved their arms directing the congregation as everyone enthusiastically sang the wonderful old songs. The Promised Land, I'll Fly Away, Rock of Ages, When The Role Is Called Up Yonder, and many more. Pop acknowledged people he knew, reaching to shake a hand, smiling a greeting as he and I walked toward the front and slid into one of the pews, picking out a hymnal and joining the chorus of voices. People remembered him and his own father, my grandfather, very well. My grandfather farmed on the Prairie until he retired, but he didn't really retire. Like some farmers, especially of his era, he continued working at something until he just couldn't physically work anymore.

Sun rays filtered in as if God were lighting the very church air with a special spiritual glow, as indeed He may have been. Looking around a bit, something toward the far back of the church caught my eye.

The back three rows on our side were filled solid with just women, old women. They sat there looking intently to the front. It seemed all were dressed in white blouses and full length grey or dark dresses. All their bodies were thin, as if the steel of character forged from a life of hard work, childbearing and husbands passing from life before them, had left only this inner core I now saw. Most, if not all of them, must have been born in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. My mind couldn't help thinking of them being young girls once, running through fields, tending

their family's garden, going to school, falling in love, and raising families. Now they sat together in these back pews enjoying the waves of spiritual sounds washing over and through them; enjoying the companionship of friends just like them. Very few of them were singing, mostly just listening. Suddenly I was wishing I could give them back the life they had lived, just let them continue to live it. Knowing how they surely had loved it and the people in their lives. But now they sat there together, listening to the music they had grown up with in churches of times gone by.

Later it was time for dinner on the grounds. A few people continued singing, most started walking out underneath the front overhang to the wide grassy yard surrounding the building. In the grassy yard out to the side of the sanctuary, permanent wooden plank frames covered in chicken wire served as tables that the women were now covering with table cloths and setting down dishes of food until the frames literally sagged.

Many of the dishes were picked fresh from the garden that very morning, all freshly cooked and homemade. There were pots of chicken and dumplings, plates of piles of battered fried steaks, pans of roasts swimming in rich gravy, some with carrots and potatoes, pots of varieties of freshly picked and cooked peas, corn on the cob, potatoes mashed, and scalloped, yellow squash, rice, casseroles of all types, collard and turnip greens, and gallons of ice tea to wash it all down,. After stuffing ourselves there were homemade pies, cakes, and peach, berry, and apple cobblers to top it all off with homemade ice creams.

Mamaw, as we grandkids called her, Dad's mom, set up in her usual place. Dad's Father, Robert, usually called Rob by his contemporaries, we called Papaw.

I was fascinated with the shy, welcoming smile Mamaw greeted the people as they approached the tables of food and especially hers. She'd been working her head off this morning to provide the best she could, hoping they would approve of her delicious offerings. A significant group of people who hadn't brought anything but an appetite, stood with empty plates in hand, looking at all the food. All were welcome.

I had been known in the family somewhat as a bottomless pit, and this was a feast of gargantuan proportions. The cool spring air and blue sky with white fluffy clouds added to my ravenousness.

Pop and I stood with our plates full, talking and eating. An old man with weathered features like aged, beaten leather approaches and starts talking to Dad about the old days. I hear them talking of freezing nights, days hoeing crops, working in the woods, chopping cotton, days plowing with mules, people with no money scrapping by. Dad didn't say much, just smiled a little and nodded his head as the fellow talked. The man stopped and grimaced, " You know Robert, them's was hard days, hard days." He turned and looked off into the distance a moment and then looked back at Pop, " but you know something Robert, them's was good days too!" Dad smiled and nodded again.

## Chapter Two

Pop's father, my grandfather, whom I knew very well, called Papaw by his grandkids, was born in 1895. When he was born the Civil War had only been over for 35 years. Papaw's grandmother, Grannie – Dad's great grandmother, was born in 1836. Dad knew her very well. Her own children didn't want her living with them when she and her husband separated about when she turned 92, so she lived with her grandchildren. Papaw and Memaw tended to be more helpful than the rest of the family and they often kept Grannie two months or more. The other grand kids would keep her only one month at the most.

She lived to be 101 years old, dying in 1937. When she was born the U.S. was only 47 years old, if you count from when the Constitution was finally ratified by the original thirteen colonies in 1789. This lineage continues right to today, myself realizing how close to our ancestors and to the beginnings of our beautiful country most families are.

My Dad and his brother, Joe, young boys at the time, were awed by a talent Grannie possessed. She dipped snuff and could spit a stream of tobacco juice, clear across a room, hitting a brass spittoon dead on, making it ring.

Dad said she was also "bossy".



Georgia Dell and Frank Poland(Pop's Grandfather), Grannie Calthorp Poland, then the children: Papaw(Pop's Father), Eva, Avis, Matty Bell, Jacie, and front: Raby and Kelly

Grannie and her husband James came over from Tennessee, settling in the small town of Zavalla, near Camp Nancy. James was a doctor. The last nine years of her life Grannie and James separated.

Frank, Papaw's father and Pop's grandfather, had two sisters Pop and his siblings called Aunt Deede and Aunt Mitt. The two sisters married two brothers, Honest Charles Havard and Funkston Charles Havard. Honest Charles was called that because he asked for Aunt



Deed's father for her hand in marriage. Funkston Havard eloped with Aunt Mitt, though everything turned out fine with the family.

Southwell Havard was Honest Charles and Funkston's brother. At church Southwell kept noticing Charles' pretty young daughter. She began to notice him. In time they fell in love, much to his brother Charles' and Aunt Deede's horror. However, Southwell and the daughter were truly in love. They promised Charles and Aunt Deede they would never have biological children. They even signed a paper to that effect. A few years later a Harris family there in Manning lost their mother and the two Harris boys came to live with Southwell and his niece-wife who adopted the two brothers. The boys were provided a good, secure home and were well raised until grown.

Southwell went on to be the song leader at Lamber's Chapel, about five miles west of Manning past the Upper Pond. He was part of the Sacred Hearts group. He'd start out the singing by reciting in various octaves "Doe, Doe, Doe, Doe, Doe" to get everyone warmed up. When I asked Pop why they were called the Sacred Hearts, he said, "Because they considered their hearts sacred."

Dad's Uncle Henry Havard was a soldier in the U.S. Expeditionary Force commanded by General Pershing. He never made it to France. He got caught up in the world wide flu epidemic of 1917-1920 while awaiting shipping to France to join the fight. He died in a hospital in England. A poor country boy turned soldier a long way from home.

A young German corporal, who served four years as a dispatch messenger between headquarters and the German front lines in the same war, was sitting with a friend on the front lines. A sniper's bullet struck the corporal's friend, killing him. The corporal later said if the bullet had been ten inches to the right, history would have been forever changed.

In 1900 the average person lived to only 47 years old. Arizona, Alaska, and Hawaii weren't states yet. The Carter-Kelly Lumber Company was fully in business in 1906. The town of Manning itself had been founded by a Dr. Manning in 1865. He had started it with a small saw mill. But the Carter-Kelly mill, which had started construction and some operations in 1903, was built to be one of the biggest and most modern of that era. The lumber mill owners had accumulated many thousands of acres of virgin long leaf pine timber all around the site where they also built the modern mill and the town. Mr. G.A. Kelly was a farm boy from Canada who became a millwright and later built sawmills with the experience and skills he had learned. He finally wound up in Lufkin, Texas, building a sawmill, managing it for six years and then sold his share for two hundred thousand dollars, a large sum in those times.

Papaw had gone for a year to Perry Commercial College in Lufkin, Texas, which was ten miles further west from Huntington. He roomed with Watson Grimes who was also attending Perry College. Papaw studied bookkeeping, business math, and penmanship. Watson later set up retail stores for Monk Stores all across in the South Texas Valley. He returned to build a large home outside Lufkin.

Papaw's first paying job after graduation was as the bookkeeper at the Boyington saw mill. It was three miles south of Huntington just off the main, two lane road.



RW Poland, Isam Cryer, I. D. Havard,

Papaw in formal wear (pretty fancy!)

Papaw had met Mamaw when he was the bookkeeper at the Boyington Mill there. The Boyington Mill was built to harvest the trees in that general area nearer Huntington. Huntington was nine miles from Manning. The railroad or tram from Manning to Huntington was much straighter, quicker, and more reliable transportation. The road straightened out on the last mile to the Cutoff. The Cutoff was where the Manning road ran perpendicular into the Lufkin-Huntington-Zavalla main two lane road that wound up in Beaumont, Texas. From the Cutoff the dirt road twisted and turned along old property lines for five miles and became a quagmire when it rained.

Mr. Boyington later moved to Lufkin and built a big, two story red brick house in Lufkin, Texas. Years later Lola Will Powell, who had lived in Manning for years with her family when she was young, attended a party at Mr. Boyington's house there when she was in the seventh grade. She remembered going because her father had made her go.

Mamaw had graduated from Huntington High School about 1915, got her teaching certificate and went to teach a year at a small community called Olive about four miles west of Manning, down near the Neches River. Papaw must have met her there. They married and moved to his Father Frank's farm near Manning where they started building a family.

## Chapter Three

Pop was born on May 4, 1919 in a small wooden house outside the bustling saw mill town of Manning, Texas. The house was on a small farm Papaw's father let him move in with his family. At the time Manning was the second largest town in Angelina County. The settlement was four miles south of Shawnee Prairie and the Shawnee Prairie Baptist Church. Frank Poland, Pop's grandfather, was the main land surveyor for the lumber company, Carter-Kelly Lumber Company, and owned around 140 acres.

The birth was attended by the mill doctor, Dr. Linwood Denman. Many children, especially it seemed like the Black babies born during that era, were named Linwood. When Dr. Denman delivered babies, he'd ask the mother if they had a name for the baby. If they didn't he'd helpfully suggest, "Why don't you name it Linwood?" So Pop was named Robert after his father, and Linwood for a middle name.

At this time Papaw operated a small general store. It was on the road running a few miles west from Manning and served people who lived much further out from town, in the river bottom. There was a road that made a great circle from Manning following the Neches River, called the River Road. Wild hogs, called Piney Wood Rooters, squirrels, possums, raccoons, deer, grey foxes, snakes of all kinds, and even panthers lived in the various creek bottoms that fed into the great wooded expanse of the Neches river bottoms. Many thousands of acres of tall, arrow straight long leaf yellow pines dominated all the land outside the bottoms. These were virgin forests, never cut by man. Great forests with trees often hundreds of years old. The great mill in Manning and the town and the people themselves were there to cut down and cut up the great trees.

The tall, long leaf pines were the dominate species on all but the creek and river bottomland in the whole East Texas area from many thousands of years of evolution.

All over East Texas the huge, vast forests were being cut down by mills that sprang up. Sweet Union, Ratcliff (west of Lufkin), Boykin Springs (on the way to Zavalla), Alderage near Zavalla, Camden, Moscow, Diboll, Willis, and many others. Each was a company owned town. Everything emanated from the company; pay, housing, food, clothes, medical care, schools. Work was hard, hot in the summer, freezing cold in winter.

Both Pop and the oldest child Gladys were born on that farm in the small wooden house about a mile west of Manning. Gladys was born two years earlier. Gladys was named after Gladys Kelly, the daughter of Mr. Kelly, one of the mill owners and founders.

Gladys Kelly married a man named Dupre. They had a son named George Kelly. She and Mr. Dupre divorced in a few years. She inherited all her father had and moved to Lufkin with her son in years to come. With wise investments she became quite wealthy, with a large house in Lufkin. George Kelly Dubre was a classmate of Mom's brother Charles and they were all good friends.



In a few years Pop's growing family moved on the east side of Manning in the woods near Brushy Creek. Brushy Creek ran through Manning and out to the east and west of the town. On the east fork of Brushy Creek, a couple of miles out of town, Papaw, his father, and other kin folk helped clear the land. Bloomer Buford was one of the kin folk helping. Bloomer lived a ways away on the River Road.

Bloomer's father was a bit of a gambler and rambler in that he had tended to move around for jobs some. Bloomer, from a young age, worked very hard all his life, never seeming to stop. He was totally dependable.

After he finished with school Bloomer got a job paying a dollar a day there in Manning. He had his heart set on some prime farm land on Shawnee Prairie that would sell for sixteen hundred dollars. The land stayed available, and in several years, after scraping and saving he paid the sixteen hundred dollars in cash.

Papaw and kin cleared the woods to create a field to farm in. Frank Poland, Papaw's father, helped the family get started with tools and seed. It would take Frank almost an hour to travel by horse from his place, but since they were working all day it didn't matter that much. Immediately Papaw planted a large garden to help feed the family. They also planted corn to feed the mules, horses, and chickens as soon as the land was cleared. The work was hard from sunup to sundown but that's the way life was. There Joe, the next child, was born, followed by Maxerine, Mildred, and Majorie.

Light came from coal oil lamps. The fuel was really kerosene distilled from the new booming oil industry, but still called coal oil because before the petroleum boom it had come from industrially squeezed coal, and the name stuck. The inside of houses at night were much darker than we are use to today. Everything was done by coal oil lantern, cooking, cleaning, studying, getting ready for bed.

A wood stove served both as a cooking stove and a way to heat the small wooden house in winter. There were no screens on the windows and Mamaw would have a smoking fire at night to keep the mosquitoes at bay. As the children started school their lessons were studied by the light of the kerosene lamps.

Papaw was a hard worker and soon the farm produced corn, cotton, and a huge vegetable garden. The rich creek bottom land kept the family and the animals fed. Hogs were raised and ran in the woods, eating acorns and roots. Mules were the main instrument on the farm and were often used by Papaw when he hired out to the mill for various jobs, such as hauling things by wagon.

Several people ran their hogs in the common woods and each person's hog was marked so it could be recognized as that person's hog.

Papaw loved to garden. Mamaw canned peas, butter beans, tomatoes, potatoes, and the hogs yielded meat to be smoked in the smoke house to last during the winter months.

Mamaw and Papaw had bought a house already there. It had three rooms and was close to the creek. Papaw and his Dad, my Great Grandfather, split long leafed pine stakes and made a picket fence that went all the way around the house on the creek side, extending to an open back on the pasture side where the smoke house was. Papaw built it where meat would be hung high up around the inside so wild animals couldn't get to the meat. The sides had open slits so air could circulate freely. A fire, usually of hickory wood, was built in the floor middle to smoke and cure the bacon slabs and various cuts of beef and pork so they would last for months until ready to eat.

Once when Pop was five or six Mamaw heard a sow down near the creek fighting off some dog, but only she and the kids were there. She grabbed Papaw's pistol and took off with Pop in tow. The dogs had the sow and its piglets backed up against the creek bank. The old sow was trying to protect her piglets the dogs were after. The piglets scrambled around, trying to keep from being picked off. Dad was surprised when without preamble Mamaw reached up and fired the pistol at the dogs, but she missed, then fired again and again, missing over the back of the dogs each time as the gun kicked up. Firing a pistol wasn't something she normally did, but she was game and determined to protect that hog and its young. The gun explosions spooked the dogs into backing off, but they didn't leave until Pop charged them with a large stick and ran them off.

For some four years the family lived on Brushy Creek, farming, growing hogs, chickens, corn, cotton, a large garden, and kids. Slabs of bacon, pork cuts, and beef were hung in the smoke house to preserve them and give the meat a great flavor. The pork bellies, or bacon slabs Mamaw would slice into bacon to be fried in the iron skillet on the wood stove.

Once when Pop and the other kids were working in the garden a strange sound approached them. They couldn't tell where it was coming from, when suddenly appearing from over the woods and coming right toward them in the sky was a plane, a two winged biplane. That was the first one any of them had ever seen, scaring them so they all ran to the house.

In Manning all the kids went barefoot during the springs and summers. Some even during winter. Pop, his brother, and sisters also did living on Brushy Creek, east of town. One day Gladys and Pop were out from the house when Gladys shouted to Mamaw "there goes a snake!" It was a ground rattler, a small, poisonous snake. Pop said, "Yea, and it bit me on top of my foot." It sure enough had, so Mamaw took him into the house, and filled a dish pan with coal oil that they used to burn in lamps for light at night, and made him keep it in that for a day and a half. His foot swelled up to twice its size but finally the swelling went down and Pop's foot returned to normal after a couple of weeks.

While living on Brushy Creek Papaw often went into the forests harvesting white oak trees; Mr. Gibbs, the mill manager, didn't care if the hardwood from the creek and river bottoms was harvested as long as the pine timber was left for the mill. Papaw and a hired hand would saw down the oak trees with a cross cut saw. Pop and his younger brother Joe were getting to where they could help out also. After cutting the oaks down, Papaw would take a regular ax, making cuts along the sides, they'd then take a broad ax, squaring the logs up. They cut these to four feet long, about four inches thick and eight wide. They'd fill the wagon up and haul it all to the turpentine mill in Zavalla, about ten miles away. There, at a turpentine processing operation just south of Zavalla called Camp Nancy, the staves would be cut and steamed and then bent slightly to make wooden barrels.

Papaw would also cut other type of oak, especially post oak trees, to make railroad ties. They were eight feet long cuts. He'd take an axe and hit it just to the right depth all along the sides. Then he'd take a broad axe and square off the sides to make a square sided tie that would be sold to the railroads. Papaw was one of the best at making the first side cuts just the right depth. A broad axe had a blade that flared out further than a regular axe, making it more suitable to flatten out the sides to make a tie.

Papaw also worked a lot for Mr. Gibbs, the mill manger, doing various hauling jobs with his wagons and mules. Mr. Gibbs liked using Papaw because he knew he always gave a man his hardest effort and was honest through and through.

Mr. Gibbs had started out at Manning as a common laborer, helping to build the lower pond next to the mill where all the logs went before being sawed. He worked his way up over the next years to the top job in Manning, mill manager. He was fair, honest, and liked by all the workers and people in the town.

All through the forest, ahead of the cutting crews from the mill, laborers would hand make herringbone cuts with a special tool into the pine trees near the tree base. These cuts ended in wooden spigots that made the resin seeping out of the tree flow into a metal cup. The spigots were wooden so when they were left embedded in the tree they wouldn't damage the mill saw when later cut up for lumber. When filled, a wagon pulled by mules would go through the woods collecting them. Sometimes a small stand holding a portable pan would be taken into the woods. A fire would be lit under it and the raw resin would flow down into a large barrel.

The men making the cuts to cause the resin to flow down into the cups were usually white men. It was considered that black men couldn't do the job as straight as it was needed. Fallacy of course, but those were the times.

The metal cups holding the hardened resin, picked from the trees would be delivered by Papaw by wagon to Camp Nancy. It was managed by Mr. Newsome, who was a good friend of Mr. Gibbs, the mill manager at Manning. The resin would be boiled from the cups and filtered to make turpentine, then put into the white oak barrels to be loaded onto rail cars and shipped to northern cities for use in making paints, ointments, lamp fuel, and many other uses. A sea of barrels far and wide set next to the railing awaiting shipment. Pop and his brother Joe would jump all over from barrel to barrel as Papaw conducted his business with Mr. Newsome.

## Chapter Four

The lumber company owned everything, the land, the trees, the mill, the houses, the town hotel, theater, the school, everything. Everyone in some way made their living from the mill, either working directly in it or the woods, or in some support role tied in the local economy to it.

Everyone working for the mill was paid once a week in coins. From pennies to quarters was thin aluminum. From half dollars to dollars were brass. These could be redeemed at the company store, the commissary for food goods, dry goods, horse tack, spices, drugs, candy, everything. Pop said Mr. Hicks, who ran the counter on one side of the store would give you the most candy for a penny, filling up most of a small paper sack. The metal coins were later made of wood. Mr. Hicks' grandson Jack, became a well know, very successful civil attorney in Lufkin years later.

If you took the coins anywhere else that might redeem them besides the company store or maybe somewhere in Huntington, you might get eighty or ninety cents on the dollar.

Three men, Guy Kirsch, Marshall Burnett, and Mr. Kilgore, head of the crew, were the main carpenters building and adding to the houses in Manning. None were painted except the mill manager's house, Mr. Gibbs. It was two stories and the biggest house in town. The second story was added in 1927. The house was built right over the stumps of trees logged over. They are still there today, right under that house, which is kept as close to its original style as possible by the Flournoy family.

Papaw's father, Frank Poland, had Papaw and six other kids by his first wife, Georgia Dell. She died as a result of child birth, devastating Frank. Here he was with kids and no wife. Soon Frank started noticing a young woman at church named Woody Buford. She noticed him. Once Frank after supper left the house a bit before dusk and walked out through the woods. Papaw and his brother, curious, followed discretely a ways behind him. They stopped when they saw their Father through the woods. He was sitting with Woody in the back of a wagon, holding hands, with their feet dangling out behind.

Frank had a good job with the mill as its chief surveyor. He would survey off plots of land that the mill wanted cut, making sure the property lines were orderly and accurate. One of Pop's earliest memories is helping pull the metal measuring chain through the woods in helping out his grandfather. He was five or six years old. The chain was a series of linked metal rods of thirty three and one third inches long. Each link was called a vara. It was an old Spanish unit of measurement. Though young, Pop and Joe were expected to work right along with Papaw.

Soon Frank and Woody married, in time having another five children. Frank lived to be only 54 when he had an apparent heart attack. He was a tall man, six foot two, and his first child, the tallest son, Papaw, only grew to about five foot ten. But he was square and strong.

Pop's family lived at Brushy Creek for about four years and then moved into Manning when Pop was about five and a half, and Papaw got the job as the wood yard manager for

the mill. They moved into what everyone called the Dago Quarters. That's where most of the Italian immigrants who moved to Manning took up living. Dago Quarters wasn't a derogatory term in any way, it was just what that particular neighborhood was called.

In 1919 when Pop was born, areas of the United States were still living the pioneer life of developing the resources of the nation by blood, sweat, and tears. In 1873 Andrew Carnegie opened the largest steel mill in the world near the sleepy little town of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. The total U.S. production of steel in 1860 was only several thousand tons. After Carnegie opened his mill using the Bessemer steel process, enabling steel to be made cheap and abundantly, the price of steel dropped 80%, making it affordable for many more uses. That along with huge iron ore deposits discovered in Michigan, contributed to meeting the explosive demand for the metal, and in 1900 alone the United States produced eleven million tons of steel for use in rails, buildings, ships, and other products. In Manhattan in 1902 sixty seven skyscrapers were under construction.

A significant part of the nation's development had been the discovery of abundant crude oil in Texas, starting big in Beaumont, Texas in 1901. It was heralded in with a roar by the blow out of the first successful discovery well in that area called Spindle Top. It blew in at over one hundred thousand barrels of oil a day and continued for nine days and nights, a solid plume of oil exploding to over one hundred fifty feet in the air until crowds of men were able to bring it under control. The era of the accelerated industrial age had arrived in Texas. Soon wildcatters were risking everything to discover oil fields all over Texas. Burk Burnett was a town north west of Austin that grew overnight with an oil discovery, and many others. When the giant East Texas Field was discovered around Kilgore and started serious volume production in the early '30s the price of oil dropped to ten cents per barrel. It was cheaper than water.

Life in the 1920's was risky and many diseases hadn't been conquered. About 1926 Pop and his family moved into Manning where the last of Pop's siblings, twin sisters, were born to the family, Earlene and Merlene. When they were still babies, Earlene contracted whooping cough, a serious respiratory illness that caused fluid to build up in the lungs and the person to cough a lot, trying to get rid of it. All of the kids had it at one time or another. Mamaw had stayed up attending the Earlene for a couple of days and nights, but it wasn't getting better. One night the illness became too much and the baby passed away. For years Mamaw carried a silent guilt for not having done everything to keep her baby alive. But there was simply nothing else she could have done.

Many of the children and adults also had bouts with malaria, borne by mosquitoes. Pop experienced malaria, as did his brother and sisters. It would cause them to have chills followed by fever. This was usually during the summer when the mosquitoes spread the disease. Mamaw would give them quinine to combat it and gave it to them in black coffee to try to mask the terrible taste. For years we've joked with Pop about drinking cream and sugar with a little coffee thrown in, until he told us the reason recently.

Pop's best friend was actually his uncle William. William was Frank and Woody's child, from Frank's second group of children, thus Papaw's half brother and Dad's uncle. William had eaten raw sweet potatoes one day. That night he was in great pain because the chewed raw tuber had packed up in his intestines, causing bowel obstruction. Dr. P.C. Clements, the mill doctor, was out of town with no one else knowing what to do. William died in the early morning.

Pictured here is Pop on the left and His uncle William on the right. They were three or four years old.



When he was about eight years old, Pop's sister Mildred had a serious operation in the Lufkin hospital and her recovery was expected to be long. Papaw didn't want to continue paying for an expensive hospital room and had Mildred brought back to Manning. She stayed in the clinic next to the commissary for six weeks. Papaw paid Masie Holland, one of the Manning school teachers, to stay with her at night.

Mamaw, as the custom of the day, also had all of her children take Castor oil by the spoon full. It was an oily liquid derived from the Castor bean, tasted terrible, and suppose to be good for a child's health. Everyone hated it, but everyone got to take it.

When Pop was about seven or eight he went with the rest of the family to Aunt Mary Runnels' funeral. She was his great aunt, and Mamaw's aunt, and Mamaw's Mother's sister. They rode in a Model A Ford on the main road between Lufkin and Beaumont. The ruts had formed from cars struggling through the mud during the last rain, and were so deep it was most practical to just stay in them all along the road. Years later the road was later paved.

Mamaw, Pop's Mother, had three brothers and one younger sister. Her Father, Weed Wilson, was called Weed by everyone because he was tall and skinny and grew like a weed as a boy, and was also bald on top. Her Mother passed away not long after Weita, the last child came along. Weed couldn't take care of all of them by himself as he also had to work, so they went to live with their Aunt Mary, her Mother's sister. She made them a good home until they were old enough to leave. This was the aunt who had raised Mamaw and her siblings whose funeral they were attending.

When Mamaw was five years old her older brothers, R.E. and Hamp, just for meanness would force powdered snuff into her mouth. At first she would fight and gag on it, but they kept doing it at times and soon she got to liking it. She dipped snuff, Levi Garrett, strong stuff, for the rest of her life. There was an expression back then, "If I tell you a hen dipped snuff, you can look under its wing and see the Garrett." Meaning the hen was carrying Levi Garrett snuff and thus you were for sure telling the truth.

Mamaw's father had married a lady named Runnels. His father had been a doctor back in the 1800's. Weed had gone to medical school but didn't finish like his brother did, and wound up running a general store in Huntington. Pop and his family bought clothes there regularly in years to come because they carried all kinds of clothes including children's, with most of the men and boys buying overalls to wear.

For young boys Manning, Texas was a tough, fun, exciting place to be growing up in. The town was surrounded by seemingly endless forests of tall, virgin long leaf yellow pine. Dad

remembered the original forest very well. The trees stood ramrod straight up to one hundred and fifty feet. Limbs often wouldn't be growing out of the trunk until sixty feet up the trunk. The forest was a thick carpet of large pine needles as much as two feet thick, with the huge trees forming such a canopy that little grew beneath them. They went on for miles in all directions as the rolling land gradually gave way to the river bottom of the Neches River various oaks, hickory, sweet gum, sassafras, and elms grew all along the river and various creeks that cut through the land. Giant, tall cypress trees with cypress knees sticking up around the trunk bottom rose out all along the river bank.

During heavy rains the river and creek bottoms would flood. Pop said you'd often see a line of Piney Wood Rooters, wild hogs, swimming in a line, trying to find a place to stand. Even during a flood the train could go from Manning to Camden, to the other mill, about thirty miles away through the woods as the tall bridge pilings carried the train way up over the river on the river trestle.

In 1927 an unusually wet early spring in the central U.S. caused the Mississippi River to flood out of its banks and most of seven states were inundated with people forced out of their towns and homes with many living on the dikes and levees along the Mississippi. Papaw and some of the men from Manning took their hand tools and headed over to the Mississippi to work for weeks to shore up the levees.

The government put an engineer in charge to coordinate the various government efforts to help the people in need, to repair and rebuild the levees and coordinate volunteers. The engineer did a great job; his name was Herbert Hoover, a future President of the United States.

Lola Will Powell's Father was the mill secretary. Her grandmother, her Mother's Mother, at eight years old, came over from Georgia with other family members, walking and riding wagons. It took them three weeks to get from Georgia to Newton, Texas to join other family. They arrived on Christmas Eve, with the greeting family building a roaring fire in their fireplace. Her grandmother said that fire felt so good after all the walking in the cold. Of course their family didn't know what day they would arrive, just generally when they were coming there. Years after her grandmother passed on Lola Will found a letter her grandmother had received from her brother back in Alabama, telling of the family who still lived there. Back then when people moved to another state they generally left for good, never again seeing the home and family they left behind.

Her grandmother was a great story teller and loved to tell ghost stories. She'd have Lola Will and her friends on the edge of their seats with her tales. Her grandmother's name was Sarah Henrietta Eudora Oates, but everyone called her Sally. Oates was her maiden name.

Her grandmother's father was wounded in the Mexican-American War 1846-48, and received a medal for his actions. Lola Will's older brother Robert was given the medal by her grandmother. Robert would earn his own medals in the years to come on a foreign island named Okinawa.

In Spring she remembered pansies would cover the thick forest floor all around with the soft breeze through the pine canopy quietly whispering. As a young girl she, Louise Day, and Clarise Gliddon would lay on this cushion of forest floor amid the many colored flowers listening to the breeze blowing through canopy high above, just dreaming. Lola Will had to churn milk to make butter just like other kids, but she'd sneak in some sodium to make it clabber faster.



Her grandfather on her mother's side, rode a horse from Newton in southeast Texas over to Huntsville, Texas attend college to become a teacher, which he did. He could barely make a living as a teacher and became a surveyor, marrying her grandmother and settling down in Lufkin.

Pearl Moore remembered sitting on her family's front porch and looking out at the tall, virgin forest stretching to the horizon. Her brother Prentis joined the Marines just out of high school. He really wanted to join the Navy, but his mother wouldn't hear of it, but let him join the Marines. He was stationed at Pearl Harbor some years later when planes appeared suddenly out of the sky and started dropping bombs and torpedoes.

Pearl's oldest brother, Curtis, everyone called Dummy. Not because he was stupid, but because he couldn't talk. He was said to be very handsome. When quite young he had his tonsils taken out and a mistake by the doctor left him without speech. Dad said he could usually understand what Curtis was trying to say by reading his lips, but the school didn't have the ability to teach him and he was sent off to a state institution. Today many techniques would enable him to communicate and maybe even regain his speech, but they weren't available then.

Years later Lola Will Powell and her family had moved to Austin. They passed the institution where Curtis was, stopped and picked him up and drove with him for an hour or so. She said he really seemed to enjoy getting away. I'm sure now he has passed on to a far happier place than the life he had here.

Huge logs from the surrounding forests were off loaded from the rail line, called the tram, and dumped into the mill pond that Mr. Gibbs had helped build. This was right in the middle of town with the mill. Most of the mill abutted right besides the millpond on the black side of town. The town actually had two distinct sides. This was segregated America. There was a black side of town, and a white, Italian, everyone else side of town. The black folks side had their own school, hotel, and houses.

Both sides were on land that was higher and sloped down to the mill pond and the mill itself. The lumber company of course also owned all the black side of town. Men walked on the logs floating on the mill pond, moving them around with grappling hooks. It was dangerous work and the men risked falling between the logs and getting crushed between them.

Pop ran with a rowdy group of friends. One of the leaders was a big, double jointed boy named Earl Holland. Sometimes they would walk out on the logs for the excitement of it, as boys are inclined to do, daring each other and themselves to see how far they could get across the log laden pond without falling. They'd start walking on one of the long floating logs, causing it to spin in the water, not always on purpose, trying to balance. Once Earl pushed Joe into the water. They rushed to pull Joe out before he got crushed between two of the large floating logs. They fell off more than once, but were young, agile and always managed to scramble back on top without getting hurt.

One time Mamaw, looking for Joe and Pop, went over to the Holland place, asking where Pop and Joe might be. "They's out with Early", Mrs. Holland told her. Mamaw looked in a couple of places but soon headed straight for the mill pond. Pop and Joe saw her coming, so they scrambled out, and she whipped them all the way home with a switch she had conveniently brought with her.

Earl Holland's father was John Holland and he worked in the planer mill. That's where all the rough lumber was smoothed off. The Hollands lived across the street from Pop and his family and down a few houses. They lived on a corner and Pop's family was on a corner on their side.

He said Mr. Holland was the fastest walker he had ever seen. Mr. Holland would walk home for lunch every day, and back to work after lunch. Everyone walked in those days.

The mill steam whistle sounded early in the morning to start the day's work. It blew at the start of lunch, blew when lunch was over and time to go back to work, and blew when the day's work was done. It could be heard for miles around.

Earl was a year or two older than Pop. He, Joe, Earl Jones, and others would follow him as they'd explore the whole area. One hill a quarter mile east from Manning was called Hollow Hill. Pop said when you'd stomp on it, it sounded hollow, like there was a large cave down in the hill. They got shovels and dug all over it but never did find a way into the cave.

Marze Hill is twelve miles east of Manning and about one hundred feet high. It was named for a man named Marze who became obsessed with a rumor that Mexican money had been left in a cave on the hill. He worried about it and hunted so long for the treasure he went crazy. A few years after that, two men did find a cave, but also found a huge rock inside the cave covering a hole. They had to leave, thinking they would come back, but when they did never did find the cave again.

Pop and his buddies would give anything to visit inside the mill by themselves with all its steaming, whirring machinery. He wasn't suppose to be in the mill because it was dangerous, and Papaw didn't want him distracting the men inside, but Pop did go inside at times, all over the mill with Papaw.

The logs were pulled by chain, called a bull chain, with metal hooks into the mill. Some people called it the green chain. First, the logs went through the saw carriage, a forty foot



fast moving metal monster with a large saw would slice through the huge logs held fast by metal togs, cutting off the bark sides and once squared up, into lumber. The lumber would usually be sent to be sized and then to the kiln for curing. From there it would go to the planer for all the sides to be milled smooth. The rough lumber was cut into a little larger dimensionally so that when milled smooth, the finished lumber would be a true two by four inch board.

Not these one and three quarter boards now days.

One black lady named Cat Simmons could catch more fish from the Mill Pond with a cane pole than anyone. In years to come she would help line up cotton pickers for farmers.

Most houses had wooden fences around them, with broad boards running along the tops. A young boy could almost walk from one end of Manning to the other along the tops of the fences. Pop and his gang often tried doing just that, especially when the streets were full of mud. Since they were usually barefoot, it helped greatly to avoid the grassburrs that seemed to spring from the sandy soil all over Manning. Their barbs were almost like metal spikes, sticking painfully into any bare foot bottom or toes, and any grass in the yards of the houses in Manning was mostly hoed out to keep grassburrs from growing.

Pop's gang weren't into any harm, just fun and adventure. There was Earl Holland, Earl Jones, Pop, Jabo Havard, and Woodrow Crain. In elementary school there was also a good friend, Scott Kitchens. He was a big raw boned kid. Though Pop wasn't as big he was scrappy and Scott and Pop would often wrestle. Scott had big older brothers, so whenever Pop would get the better of him one of Scott's brothers would come over and put Scott back on top. The boys all wore overalls and shirts made out of feed sack cloth.

Horse and mule feed came in sacks of tremendous varieties of color and patterns. The feed manufacturers knew many of their customers were rural folk with limited fund, and many of the colors and patterns were striking in appearance. Once the feed was used up, Mamaw would make the girls dresses from the cloth and shirts for the boys.

Once in the third grade Turk Burnett, a kind of mean kid, sat behind Pop. Turk kept bugging Pop, flicking his ear, distracting him during class, poking him, and continually making a pest of himself. Nothing Pop did or said got him to quit. Pop talked it over with Papaw and Papaw gave him a Barlow pocket knife and told him what to do.

The next morning Turk started in on his usual irritations. Pop stood, turned, and started pulling out his pocket knife, opened it and said, "if you don't stop I'm going to stick you with this!" When he saw Pop start pulling out his knife Turk came out of his chair, Pop lunged, Turk lit out of the room like a scalded dog but the teacher, Paul White, caught Turk and caught Pop coming right behind him. They both got a whipping. Pop never had any more trouble out of Turk as he was moved over to sit among a bunch of girls, but seemed not in any hurry to nag Pop anymore. In years to come Pop and Turk remained friends.

One year Dad had Mrs. Hawkins, Clint Hawkins' wife for a teacher, when all the kids had to get up in front of the class and recite a poem. Pop choose Eldorado by Edgar Allen Poe, ending the track with a flourish, "Over the Mountains of the Moon, Down the Valley of the Shadow, Ride boldly ride, the Shade replied, If you seek for Eldorado!" He added in conclusion, "So I boldly rode and found my Eldorado herein Manning, Texas.", the teacher was impressed as also was Mr. Flournoy who Pop remembers being there at the time.

Scott Kitchens and his family lived in a box car for several years. There were three cars on a spur just on the south edge of town where they lived along with two other families. The Barkley family also lived in a box car. Mr. Barkley said they called them "car houses". Barkley's mother was a Havard.

Much of the town children's lives revolved around the school outside of summer. There was always new families moving in and out of Manning. When new boys would first come to school there was kind of a ritual to introduce them to the rest of the crowd their age. Pop said they would kind of sidle up to the new guys saying, "Eh, think your pretty tough, coming into our school. Think you'll run away like a sissy, Eh?" Sooner or later they'd fight. Nothing destructive, just young kids wrestling and a few swings, but real fights. "Some of 'em we could whup, some we couldn't."

On Main street was the mill manger's house, the commissary, and the clinic next to the commissary. The clinic had a few beds and next to it standing by itself was the jail. Just up from Main Street toward the top of the hill was the hotel and beside it was Dirty Street that went around the hill just below the hotel and on to go over the hill. It was called Dirty street because in dry weather the sand was "shoe mouth deep.", and when rainy was a bog. Sometimes in the summer a water wagon would wet it down some to try and control the dust. The houses on Dirty Street were considered somewhat of a lower income area.

Back on the east side of town a board walk ran along the street that went over the dam and all the way through the middle part of the town part way up the hill almost to the school, allowing people to kind of stay out of the mud.

Dirty Street ran on into Sweet Gum Valley south of town, so called because of all the sweet gum trees in the creek bottom. A little further was the rail spur with Scott Kitchens' family. To the right of Dirty Street, Main Street went straight west out of town past Punkin Hill and turned into the River Road. It went way out and followed the Neches River as it wound its way southeast, lazily through the river bottom it formed. Families lived way out along the River Road, farming small plots of land, a garden, raising a few hogs and a milk cow; hunting and fishing to help get food for their families. It was basic subsistence farming.

A sweet girl named Agnes Mosley lived with her family on Dirty Street. "Eh boys, Robert's always wanting to go play on Dirty Street. WE know why. Ag-nice Mosley!" Pop's rowdy friends mocked him about her as young boys are want to do. He never understood why they kept doing it, but the small shadow of a smile would cross his face when he talked about her.

Life along the River Road was generally a hard life with no running water, no electricity, just an outhouse for sanitation. But the same was for all the families in and around Manning. The people in Manning or right around the town had the mill doctor who came to homes fairly quickly with the town clinic being right next to the commissary.

For the people on the River Road medical care was hours or days away. The River Road itself was muddy and full of ruts. Few if any motor vehicles were used by the folks that lived out along it, only horse or mule drawn wagon. Money was scarce all the time. What little was made might be from some small cotton plots or sugar cane. Corn was raised for any animals the family might have. Some of the men worked at the mill and so could get goods at the commissary.

The commissary was the center of shopping for the whole town. To kids it was almost a magical place with smells of leather, turpentine, coal oil, and grain. It had everything, tools, canned goods, all types of clothes, harnesses for mules and horses, axes, and saws.

One of Pop's best friends was Woodrow Crane. He and his family lived out on the River Road and had a small farm raising corn, some cotton, vegetables, maybe some sugar cane they would turn into ribbon cane syrup in one of the small syrup mills in the area. One large bend in the Neches was called Weaver Bend because of the various Weaver families that lived right where the river made its big bend with the Road following this bend.

Past Punkin Hill was the Upper Pond. It was shallow, and made by damming up Brushy Creek, before a mile later the stream flowed through town, where it was dammed again, making up the mill pond. The stumps that had been logged in the area the Upper Lake formed were left there in the lake. In the summer when it was shallow Pop and Joe would jump from stump to stump all over the Pond. They would often see poisonous moccasin

snakes but paid them little mind. In fact he and his friends often went swimming in the Upper Lake, "a bunch of boys could run out a bunch of snakes".

Back on the mill pond the huge logs would be guided over to the chain ramp by the river hogs. The green chain or bull chain, as it was called, then pulled them up into the mill. The log would be pulled onto a large metal carriage that carried them back and forth seeming to throw the thick logs into a large band saw or circular saw that sliced through the log, first cutting off the sides of the log with the bark, squaring it up. The strong smell of pine sap filled the air along with grease and oil from the machinery. Then boards of various sizes and lengths would then be cut off until there was only a railroad tie cut left or the remaining center was cut into boards. These were real boards, a real two or four inches thick, not the less than two inches we still call a two by four today. The boards would first be slid onto metal dollies that sent into the kiln. This heat treatment forced out the moisture, curing the wood, preventing it from warping later. The kiln was heated by heat from the giant boiler. The wood would then be sent to the planer. All the boards would be just a little bit wider than the final width they would wind up with, because in getting their surfaces smoothed out along their length and sides by the planer, the boards would be reduced in size just a bit.

The wood waste, and sawdust sent to the huge boiler kept the whole mill running. A huge Corliss Valve engine was powered by steam from the boiler. The huge fly wheel on it would drive a wide belt that turned a drive shaft that ran all through the mill. Other belts, fixed to this shaft, would power various machinery throughout the mill. This was a common configuration in many industrial enterprises in booming America, especially in the north east.

Boards would be cut as long as twenty four feet. The growth rings in the wood from these trees were close together, giving the wood an especially strong structure. Solid, strong, free of knots, it was ideal for building a young growing nation and emerging world power. For some navies of the world, and sailing vessels, these great, straight trees would be cut and shipped by rail to Orange, Texas, a port on the Gulf of Mexico, to be shipped all over the world, especially to England, to be used as masts on ships.

The surrounding forests of towering trees made it all possible. They were the reason for the mill, the town, the school, buildings, and people.

## Chapter Five

During this time, in 1923, a World War I veteran soldier who had attained the rank of corporal on the front lines during the war led a violent attack on the seat of German government, called the Reichstag. The soldier had loved the army and after the war had orders to infiltrate a small German worker's party and report back to the German government. Instead the man took over this small ultra nationalist party, the National Socialist Party, by sheer force of will, gall, and oratory. Shots fired in the action at the Reichstag killed three of the attackers and three bullets severely wounded a man who threw himself in front of Adolph Hitler.

Around 1926 Papaw got the job of managing the wood yard for the mill. This was where all the waste ends, trimmings, and slats were conveyed out of the mill. They came way out from the mill on a long conveyor belt and fell into a large pile of wood. Papaw would cut these pieces to size so people could use them in their wood cook stoves. These pieces Papaw, Pop, and Joe would load into a wagon and haul to people all around Manning so they could fuel their stoves for cooking and heat. It didn't matter that Pop and Joe were so young, Pop was seven and Joe barely six, they worked outside of school and during the summers. But during school lessons had to be done and done well. Papaw and Mamaw believed in feverently in education. Papaw supplied the school all its wood and also the black folk side of Manning. The natural, thick pine resin in the wood made ideal, quick starting, and hot burning fires. Papaw got a dollar for delivering a whole wagon load. He kept fifty cents and the mill got the other half.

Papaw had bought a bobtailed truck. People were always moving in and out of Manning and Papaw, Pop, and Joe would move them for a fee. Papaw could get an entire household, with all their goods on one load to take them to wherever they were moving to. He'd move people to Manning also. He and his boys stayed busy in addition to the wood yard and making barrel staves. When Pop and Joe, his brother, weren't in school, they were of the age now they were working in the afternoons, Saturdays, and often Sunday afternoon. Mamaw saw that Sunday mornings were for church.

The family had moved into a typical wooden house in town, located in the Dago quarters. That's where most of the Italian immigrants located when moving into Manning. Pop would sometimes be picked on about living there but he thought nothing of it. His family moved into

the house previously occupied by Destafano who moved to Lufkin to start a successful lumber yard.

The saw dust and other wood debris that heated the large boiler that turned a large electric generator and powered the mill also produced electricity conveyed by wires to places such as the commissary, the mill manager's house, the lumber company secretary's house (Lola Will Powell's family), the hotel, the movie theater and the ice house.

The rough boards were taken by conveyor to the planer which smoothed the board surfaces. The boards came off the planer wide and smooth. They would then be taken to the kiln, which was also heated by burning the saw dust and wood waste from the sawing operations. As mentioned, this curing process kept the planks from warping later. These straight, long, smooth masses of lumber were then shipped by rail to all over a growing nation buying this top quality building material. The mill averaged thirty million board feet per year production, and for years in full production the mill worked everyone six days a week.

There were men operating all the machinery, saw sharpeners, mechanics, power plant workers, plank graders. With all that moving machinery men were inevitably injured. Same went for those working in the woods with saws and axes. Once Marshall Burnet, Turk's father, was way up high on the smoke stack painting it, slipped and fell many feet. This was long before a man tied himself off, long before OSHA mandated safety procedures in America's workplaces. Somehow he lived and after recovering had a terrible limp and was a cripple the rest of his life. It was a progressive mill, but still men often lost fingers and had smashed and broken bones both in and outside the mill. The mill had some kind of insurance and Mr. Burnet used the money to buy farm land on Shawnee Prairie.

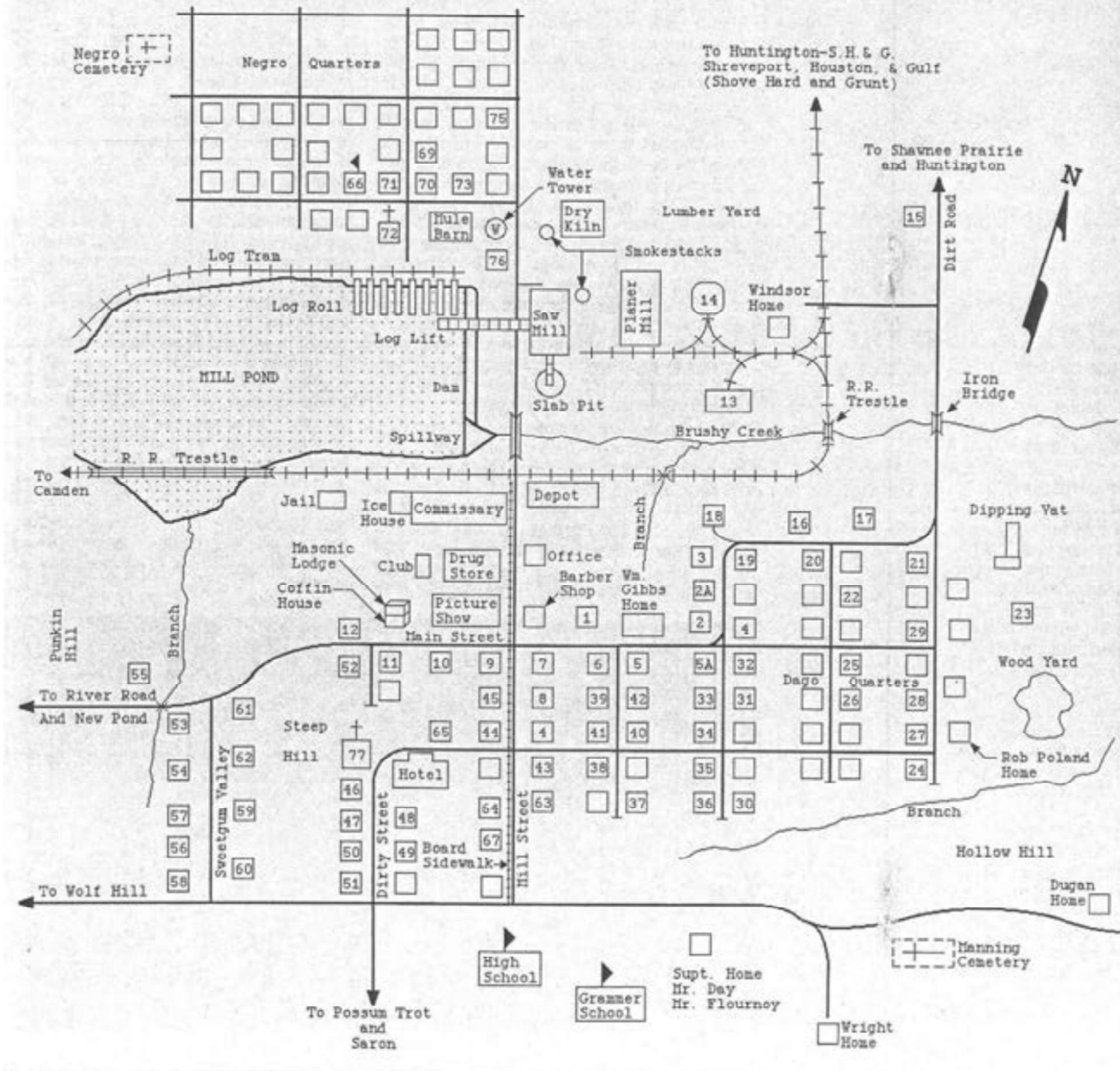
The "Upper Pond", about a mile from the mill pond and built at a higher elevation, was used to replenish the mill pond whenever it ran low, especially in the summer. A tanker car on a tram engine would draw water up from the Upper Pond, carry it over and let it out into the mill pond.

The river and creek bottoms held all kinds of critters, possums, raccoons, squirrels, bob cats, birds, even an occasional panther. Pop said you would sometimes hear them sounding off in the night. "They sounded just like a woman screaming."

Immigrants continued flooding into the U.S. and Mr. Gibbs, the mill manager, had a standing order with the Immigration Department in New York that the lumber company would pay the passage of any immigrant that was willing to move to Manning and work in the mill or the woods. During this time a lot of Italian immigrants were coming into Ellis Island with a lot of them moving to Manning to live and work.

The white side had a theater where silent movies were played because sound wasn't in yet. The picture show was next to Main Street, beside the Masonic Lodge and the Coffin House. The Commissary and the Ice House were further down the hill from Main Street and next to the railroad as it came through town next to the mill pond.

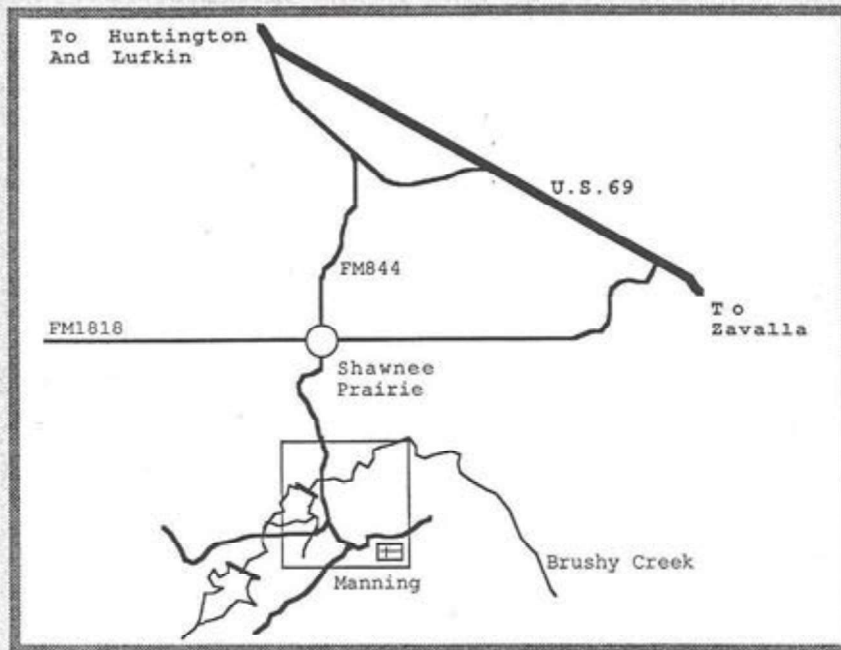
# WERE YOU AT MANNING?





## LEGEND

- |                       |                       |                         |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. H. K. Edwards      | 25. Mack Gilbert      | 52. Guy Kersh           |
| 2. Dudley (Bud) Gibbs | 26. Levey Causey      | 53. Needum Weatherford  |
| 2A. Jessie Jones      | 27. Victor LaMont     | 54. Stanley             |
| 3. Boley Havard       | 28. Phieffer          | 55. Jap Massey          |
| 4. Jabo Havard        | 29. Sykes             | 56. Lee Franklin        |
| 5. Ernest Gibbs       | 30. Jack Gesford      | 57. C. V. Marze         |
| 5A. Earl Melvin       | 31. Macie Holland     | 58. Walter Peden        |
| 6. Newport            | 32. Sandstrum         | 59. Free Havard         |
| 7. Dr. Denman         | 33. D. Powell         | 60. Marze               |
| Dr. Clements          | 34. Jim Moore         | 61. Ruben Weatherford   |
| 8. McCrutchin Hales   | 35. Oliver Havard     | 62. Goins               |
| 9. Bill Gooden        | 36. Ed Purvis         | 63. Sam Wallace         |
| 10. Mr. Glidden       | 37. Dewey Holland     | 64. John Stokes         |
| 11. Pat Rogers        | 38. Hamp Wilson       | 65. McCluskey           |
| 12. Horatio Havard    | 39. Taylor (Druggist) | 66. Negro School        |
| 13. Machine Shop      | 40. Kilgore           | 67. Pude Williams       |
| 14. Roundhouse        | 41. Buckner           | 69. D. Fields (colored) |
| 15. Dan Cameron       | 42. Willie Powell     | 70. Barber Shop "       |
| 16. Mike Massey       | 43. Charlie King      | 71. Pool Hall "         |
| 17. Dave Hayes        | 44. Red Waller        | 72. Church "            |
| 18. Hamilton Garage   | 45. Farris            | 73. Cat Simmons "       |
| 19. Barnes            | 46. Marshall Burnett  | 75. Tom Coleman         |
| 20. Bob Havard        | 47. Herbert Hamilton  | 76. Water Plant-        |
| 21. Jacie Poland      | 48. Mosley            | Pump House              |
| 22. Arthur Burnett    | 49. Ollie Capps       | 77. Church-             |
| 23. Slaughterhouse    | 50. Frank Woodward    | Methodist, Sunday am.   |
| 24. John Holland      | 51. Alif Kitchens     | Baptist, Sunday pm.     |



## MANNING, TEXAS

CARTER KELLEY LUMBER COMPANY

CIRCA 1926

On Saturday night the mill manager's wife, Mrs. Gibbs, would play the piano at the theater before the silent movie started. Most of the town would attend thirty minutes before the movie to hear her play, including Pop and his buddies. On some familiar songs the whole crowd would sing along as she played, "My Old Kentucky Home", "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean", "My Darling Clementine", and others.

They'd watch Tom Mix, Fred Thompson, Hoot Gibson and other western stars, shoot 'em up with the bad guys, and rescue the damsel in just the nick of time.

Often before the show started on Saturday night the men and boys would be at the barber shop just across the tracks to get a haircut. A person could get a shoe shine and even a shave and a bath if they could afford it.

Next to the picture show was the drug store. It had a fountain that offered soda, Coke, and ice cream, along with drugs prescribed by Dr. Clements or later Dr. Denman and filled by Mr. Taylor, the druggist.

About once a month a different medicine show would visit Manning and the whole town would turn out to see it. Some shows had a comic or jugglers. The show was held on a large, flat area in front of the mill.

One show had an elephant and a young girl about ten or twelve in a tight fitting dancing costume. The young boys were mesmerized by her. They always had a clown along and sold medicine by the pint for 25 or 50 cents each. The medicine couldn't be over 2% alcohol as Angelina County was dry where any liquor or spirits were concerned. Pop said they always looked forward to the show when they turned up as it was something different to see. Sometimes they'd have different exhibits of odd items and exotic pictures of animals from foreign lands. The MC would tell jokes and go on about the wonders of his magic elixir in the bottle and all the things it would do to heal a person. Lola Will's father would always buy a bottle to try just for fun.

The elephant with the little girl were something really different. The elephant would pick her up in his trunk and put her on his back. The show always startled the crowd when the little girl lay down on the ground and the elephant would walk over her and then put its foot on her chest. Everyone heaved a sigh of relief when the elephant took its foot off her and she got up unhurt. Then the elephant would lift her up high in his trunk and set her up on his back to the applause of the crowd. They heard sometime later in another town the elephant didn't take its foot off, and even with the handler in panic trying to get it to move off, in a fit of anger it killed the girl.

The only church in town was shared. The Methodists used it for their services in the morning and the Baptists in the afternoon. Mr. Gibbs, the mill manager, was a Methodist. When Pop lived there Brother Baker James Cauthern was the young, enthusiastic Baptist preacher, and Brother B.J. Hatch was the Methodist pastor. Pop and his family were Baptists.

The Black side of town had their own church. On Pop's side, Dan Cameron, the preacher for the Pentecostals or "Holy Rollers" would usually use the church to preach on Wednesday nights. Pop and his cronies, especially Woodrow Crane, would sit in the back pews and at appropriate times would holler loud but low without gestures or bring attention to themselves, "Amen Brother!" People would look around but usually couldn't tell who it was.

Lola Will Powell and Lois Day were about seven when one Sunday morning in church during the Baptist service they were asked to sing Jesus Loves Me. They got up in front the of congregation and sang it from their hearts. An older gentleman, a funny old man, after the

service told them how well they sounded. "You sang alto," he said pointing to Lola Will, "And she sang soprano." Lola Will thought he was calling her a name as she'd never heard the term alto and was put out with him, until her Mother told her what it meant.

The church was too hot to meet in during the summer so everyone met under a hand built arbor. It was a wooden frame with sweet gum limbs laid over the top for a roof and wetted to try and keep the air as cool as possible. Services held in the arbor seemed to bring out the fire in Dan Cameron, the preacher of the Pentecostals or "Holly Rollers", and the Holy Ghost in many of the parishioners. They'd get caught up the spirit, start raising their hands in the air; Rev. Cameron piled it on, raising his voice, extorting everyone to be saved, causing some to start speaking in tongues. This made it even better for Pop and his buddies to holler "Amen Brother!" at various times during the sermon, sometimes when it wasn't all that appropriate, throwing off the timing of the sermon.

Rev. Cameron also worked in the mill during the week. He had several children and later many grandchildren.

Most of the houses in Manning were unpainted, wooden, without electricity. Only the mill manager's house, the commissary and the jail were painted. The naturally heavy pine resin in the lumber of the buildings made them able to weather the elements. There was an outhouse behind each house in town. An alley ran behind rows of houses opposite the street. Mr. Tom Colman, a black man, drove the honey wagon each day. He shoveled out the buildup of the previous day from each outhouse into his wagon. One could kid about such a job, but it was extremely important, controlling such debris in a crowded area. Another black man named Tom Manley, who worked in the mill and was of rough reputation, about Tom's age, had designs on Tom's sixteen year old daughter. Manley was three times her age. Manley kept flirting with her, trying to make a move on her, and Tom Colman worked to keep the man away from her.

Finally one night Manley showed up at Mr. Colman's house. The daughter came to the door. Manley asked her to go with him but she refused. Mr. Colman got between them and told Manley to go. Suddenly Manley pulled out a "Saturday Night Special" and shot Tom Colman in the stomach. Mr. Colman died later that night.

The town constable, Jona Waits, arrested Manley and threw him in the town jail. Late that night some of Manley's friends helped him break jail and he fled Manning, never to return.

The mill manager's house was painted white and was the biggest in town. To this day it is the only original building left of Manning still standing and continues to be owned by, and until recently lived in by Mr. Flournoy's family members; Mr. Flournoy being the Manning school superintendent who took over from Mr. Day. Mr. Flournoy's daughter has recently turned it into a bed and breakfast, maintaining it as close to its original style as possible.

Mr. Flournoy graduated from college in the summer of 1929. He and Ruby, his wife, had been in the very first class of Stephen F. Austin State Teachers College in Nacogdoches, Texas.

That fall, he and his wife Ruby moved to Huntington where she taught and he took over as a principal in Manning. He commuted to Manning each day, though his car would often get stuck in the unpaved roads to Manning and he'd have to walk the rest of the way, he was only late once. After only one year he took over as superintendent from Mr. Day and he and Mrs. Flournoy moved to Manning.

They bought all the house hold goods from a family moving out of Manning for \$150.00. One item was an oil stove. An aunt who was a cleanliness fanatic came to visit after they had settled for a few weeks, and insisted the grease be cleaned off it. Following her instructions they put the stove in the back yard, doused it with gasoline and lit it on fire. The stove was put together with solder and collapsed. The aunt was so embarrassed but Mr. Flournoy was happy by the turn of events as he was tired of eating that oil stove cooking. The next weeks were a little tough as they ate off what they could cook on the living room heater until their next payday, when they could buy a regular wood stove.



Mr. Flournoy hired the best teachers and principals as Manning could pay better than most with the mill churning out such tremendous production. Manning and Lufkin were the only high schools in Angelina County where a student could go on to attend any university.

Mr. and Mrs. M.M. Flournoy

Mr. Flournoy had also functioned as a cotton buyer before in Huntington, and was a born businessman, but now he had been brought to Manning to take over the school district. The school taught grades from first up through the eleventh grade. It was supported by the Carter Kelly Lumber Company. Everything was.

Everything was owned by the Carter Kelly Lumber Company. There was even a pool hall near the commissary, but Pop and the young boys of Manning weren't allowed inside it.

Each morning the mill whistle blew. One could hear it all over Manning and for miles in all directions. People would be stirring, Mothers cooking breakfast on wood stoves for their families, Fathers getting ready for work, children getting ready for school; the wood crews getting the animals hitched up and their water and food provisions ready for a day in the woods.



Elwin Tatum with mule and water tank for a day in the woods. Behind him appear to be some "house cars" where people lived in converted box cars on the rails.

## Chapter Six

Lola Will Powell's father was the mill secretary. Her Father said he would often find grammatical errors in Mr. Gibbs letters and reports, due to his lack of education, but also said the man was very, very smart.

The only places in town that had electricity were the commissary, the ice house, the mill manager's house, and the mill secretary's house. All the rest of the houses were lighted by coal oil lamps. Cooking was done on wood stoves. The wood stoves would double in winter as heat producers for the house. In winter Mamaw would poke it full of rich lighter stakes. These were stakes from the old virgin pines, rich in pine pitch and they burned long and hot. As they burned the cast iron stove would glow red hot and fairly comfortably heat the nearby rooms of the house. Still, in winter when going to bed, one would run, jump in and pile on the covers to try and get warm.

During the summer Mamaw would also create a smoke fire to keep the mosquitoes at bay. The windows didn't have screens.

The overriding thing about living then was light. When dusk came on the only light available to most of the population was coal oil lamps. They gave off a flickering yellow light, but in the dark of night it was something to see by. There were no street lamps, no radios, no tvs, no computers, no lights one could turn on with the flick of a switch. In the woods at night there weren't hand held flash lights to see with. The railroads had hand held lamps for signaling and such, and down in the woods, on a moonless night with some cloud cover, it got pitch black. You literally couldn't see your hand in front of your face, so a campfire light or lamp light was great comfort. People went to bed early and were up usually just before the sun came up. The mill whistle blew to tell everyone when to start work.

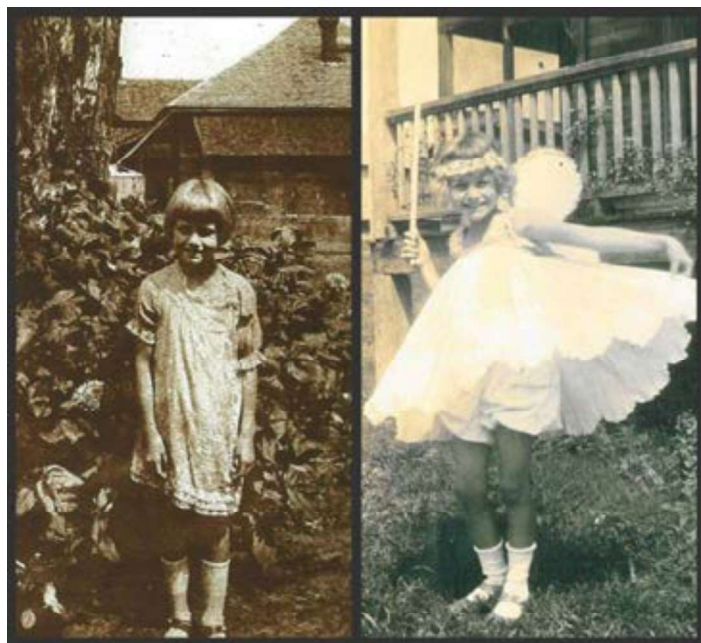
Papaw did anything he could to bring in extra money for living and saving. Besides his regular wood yard job, moving people, and making ties, he also made oak firewood. Using a thirty six inch circular saw with a one piston engine powering the saw with a band drive, mounted on a four wheel type wagon, Pop and Joe would help him cut oak trees into short lengths to fit into the wood stoves. The oak wood burned hotter and longer in the wood stoves and was more desirable. The pine would burn hot but it burned up quicker than the oak.

Pop said the woods were truly beautiful. They went on for mile after mile in all directions. The trunks were ramrod straight with many trees approaching one hundred and fifty feet high and four to five hundred years old. The high canopy was so thick that little light reached the forest floor below, except in temporary patches as the sun moved across the sky. The thick canopy and thick layer of long pine needles allowed almost no undergrowth except in the spring, when this pine carpet would sprout expanses of multi-colored pansies.

Lola-Will Powell told of going into the woods in spring as a young girl with a couple of friends and lying on the soft carpet amid the pansies that popped up all through the forest



beneath the tall canopy. Any breeze made a cooing as it blew through the huge forest. Lola Will said that was the most soothing sound in the world. She would often bring a bouquet of pansies home to her mother.



Lola Will Powell with wooden houses showing in the background.

Lola Will in a pixie dress. (Now a Great Grand Mother six times over. She'll kill me but it's history!) Note: By the time of this revision, Lola Will has passed on.

She taught Sunday School at the Methodist Church in Lufkin for 40 years.

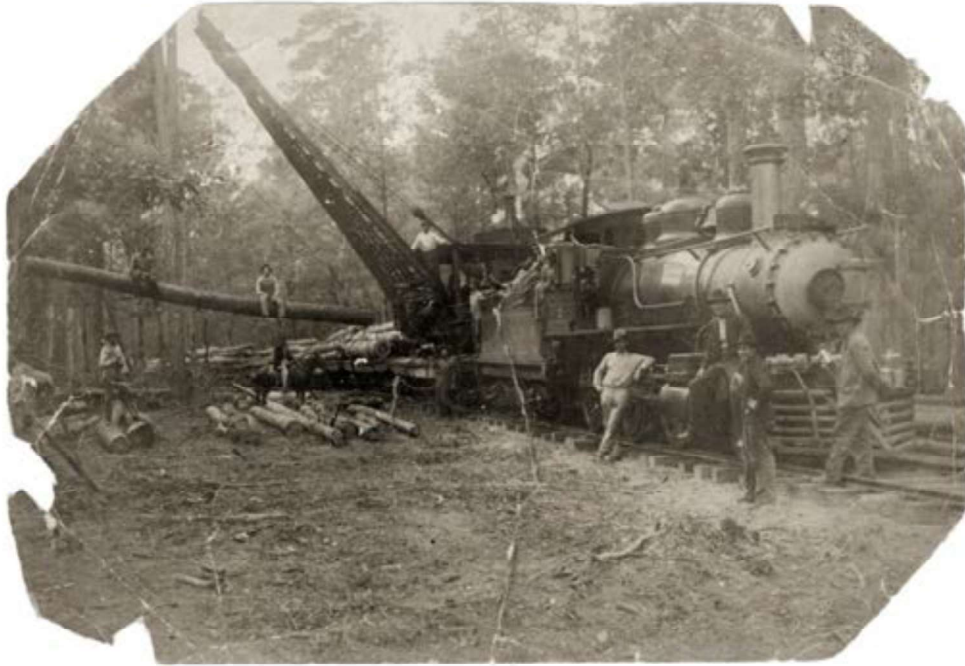
One morning in the fifth grade, Lola Will and a friend were early to school and waiting for the gate to be opened so they could go in. It was freezing cold and one of the Marshall boys from the Prairie walked up. He had no shoes, was barefoot, and his feet were red from the cold ground. The Marshall family of two parents and five children on the Prairie maintained their livelihood on a 40 acre farm. Lola Will turned and ran home. If she could just get a pair of her Dad's cotton socks the boy might not suffer the cold so. Her Mother heard her rummaging around in their bedroom and asked her what she was doing so Lola Will told her why. "Honey she said, those socks will soon get wet from the ground and he'll be even worse off. He'll be okay." Still Lola Will worried so about the poor boy.

The gangs of men working in the woods out around Manning had various functions; some crews laid tram rails all through the woods to be cut. There were no trucks and the huge motored log skidders and harvesters of today. A special locomotive and cars would bring rails and wooden ties cut from the mill. The ties were laid in paths throughout the forest areas that were to be cut and the rails nailed to them by men welding sledgehammers. The rails brought the steam locomotive which had behind it a car with a huge steam winch. A mule team would pull a long, heavy cable out into the woods as far as a hundred yards on either side of the winch car. At the end of the cable were grappling hooks. The men would hammer the grappling hooks into the long logs and the steam engine would power the huge winch, pulling the logs all through the woods up next to the rail cars where they were loaded onto cars by the loader, also powered by the steam engine.

The steam loader handled the levers with a deft touch and his well trained crew worked in unison in hosting the heavy logs onto the flat cars. The company had five locomotives and

one Shay locomotive. The Shay was slow but had a bevel gear drive for pulling power and was used primarily in the woods for steep grades and heavy loads.

The steam crane out in the woods loading logs onto an SH&G flatbed rail car on temporary rails. Note the large trees behind the locomotive.



Picture of a loaded tram on temporary tracks going to the mill. Note the virgin forest of tall, straight trees with no underbrush.

There were also teams of oxen and mules that would pull the large logs out of the woods, up to where they could be loaded onto the rail cards. It was hot, hard, sweaty work all during

the spring, summer, and fall. Picture below is typical of oxen teams hauling logs.



Needham Wetherford and his brother Rubin were the bosses of all the woodland operation crews. They were both big guys, but fair and liked by the wood crews and the men they directed to lay the tram tracks.

The giant trees were cut down by human muscle. Mechanized chain saws weren't available then, men called "flat heads" used a swayback cross cut saw, made by Simmons, to fell the giants. A man on either end of the saw would push and then pull the saw back toward him, cutting through the thick trunk. Shavings sometimes six inches long would come tumbling out. The men splashed turpentine on the saw as they worked so the resin oozing from the new cut wouldn't bind the saw. The body of the saw, called a "swayback saw", was curved so it wouldn't tend to get into a bind if the tree settled back against the cut. The saw teeth cut a groove wide enough in the tree to allow the saw to continue sliding through. The men would tap wedges made of ironwood into the cut to keep it open and help direct the tree's fall. The trees grew so straight that as the tree was cut through and the ironwood wedges were inserted and occasionally hit with a mallet, the tree gradually leaned just enough to fall where the flatheads wanted. I think they were called flatheads because they always bent down from the waist as they sawed back and forth, their heads level with their bent over body. In the stifling heat it was hard, brutal work.

Such work was often the job of black gangs, but white also. Two men would form a cutting crew. When Papaw used his swaybacks in his work, he was extremely good at keeping them sharp for best use.

Once the tall giants crashed to the ground, others in the crew used cross cut saws to cut off the large limbs and axes to finish the trimming, so only the large trunk was left. That was cut with saws to the desired lengths to load on the railcars. Then the grappling hooks were connected to the log. Another log on the other side of the winch car would be pulled at the same time to balance the weight being pulled from both sides. Little breeze made its way beneath the canopy, especially in the long, hot, humid East Texas summer. Mules and men spent the day in wringing sweat.

Charlie King was one the best of the mule skinnners in the woods. He could rig a team of mules up faster than others and was able to get the most work out of the teams he handled as they pulled logs on bull wagons, dragged grappling cables out to logs, and pulled supply wagons.



## Chapter Seven

Dad was in the second grade in the Manning elementary school. His teacher was Massie Holland, who later married Hugh Havard when she was quite a bit older. He was related to us, as most of the Havards were. The saying around Manning was there were more Havards than white people.

Massie and another female teacher roomed in the hotel for a long time while teaching at the school.



Massie Holland with various women's dress styles then, and the wooden houses and buildings of Manning in the background. The middle picture is her standing on her uncle Bledsoe Duncan's locomotive he engineered. Bledsoe married the constable Jona Waits'sister. Massie is the aunt of Keith Alred, a retired accountant in Lufkin.

The boys mostly wore overalls and the girls homemade dresses made from cheap cloth bought at the company store, or cloth from feedsacks. Dad and his Brother Joe's shirts were made from this as well as their sister's dresses. The colors were deep and rich and the patterns striking and attractive.

In the 1920's Manning was a microcosm of America with people of all races and industrialization in action. In the south and west the pioneer actions of settling America and harvesting her riches were still being played out. The vast tracts of huge virgin trees all over East Texas were being systematically cut and turned into lumber for a growing America. Many small towns sprang up at the turn of the Century only to become a memory a generation later. Boykin Springs, Ratcliff, Keltys, Moscow-south of Diboll, and many others. Diboll, ten miles south of Lufkin was such a mill town, but under the initial guidance of T.L.L. Temple and especially later the many years guidance of Arthur Temple, became the center of a huge, diverse national, forest products, land holding and finance company

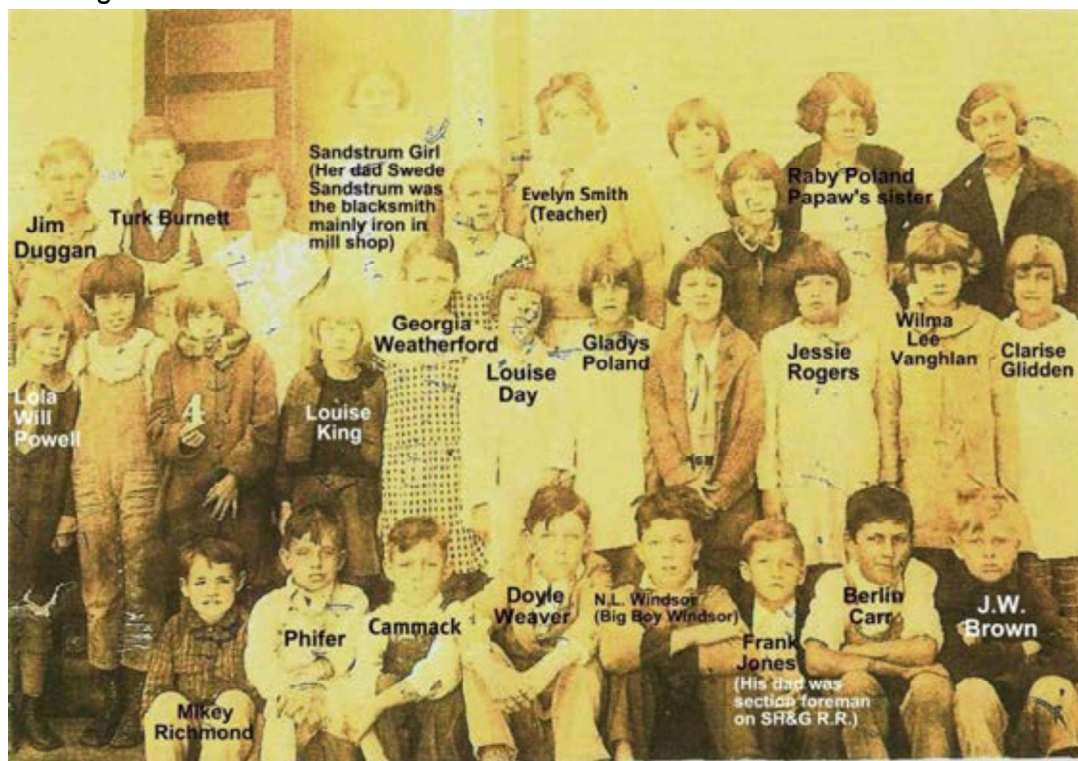
Papaw, my grandfather, having bought the contract to take the waste wood from the mill, in turn sold it to the all the houses there, and the school district for them to burn in their wood stoves for cooking and heat. This was the wood cut from the sides of logs as they were on the saw carriage. The saw carriage carried the logs back and forth, passing them through the large band saw that successively cut the logs into various lumber sizes. The sides of the logs, the ends of the lumber as it was sized, and other pieces not used would be

conveyed out of the mill to pile up. As mentioned Papaw would load them on a wagon to take all over Manning for sell for fuel. The heavy resin in the virgin long leaf pine made for an easily started fire and a hot one.

The saw dust generated in the mill and other smaller wood pieces would be sent to fire the huge metal steam boiler that powered the entire mill.

Papaw applied to join the Masonic Lodge. It was a very important social and community organization for the men of Manning and Papaw knew most of the members well. Membership elections were conducted secretly by each member dropping either a white or black ball into a bowl. If even one black ball was dropped Papaw wouldn't be granted membership. Unfortunately there was one black amount all the white during the vote for him. He always wondered who blackballed him but there was no finding out. He later joined the lodge in Huntington and was fully accepted.

Lola Will Powell remembered in the winter most of the girls wore thick, black, cotton stockings that reached up to their knees, to keep their feet and legs warm. As soon as she got to school Lola Will would roll them down to her ankles, making it look as if she had two black donuts on her ankles, because with the wood stoves in the classroom, the thick stockings became too warm.



4<sup>th</sup> Grade elementary class picture at Manning, Texas, with teacher Evelyn Smith. Big Boy Windsor was later seriously wounded in the war. (Some of the names are in white to read better against a darker background.)

In the third grade a boy, Kester Stanley, wandered over to Dirty Street with some friends at lunch time. He saw a green lizard showing its money, grabbed it and stuck it in the front pocket of his overalls. They got to playing before returning to class, with him forgetting about the lizard. This was right before summer and each child was to compose a short poem about

summer and get up and recite it in front of the whole class. Stanley's time came and he started his. " Summer's coming and I'll be glad. I'll go in swimming without asking my Dad." Just then the lizard managed to wiggle out of Kester's overall pocket to make a broad arcing jump, landing right in front of the teacher, Miss Massie. "She became unglued." Recalled Stanley. Screaming and hopping about, she ran out of the room and didn't come back for quite some time. Kester figured she was telling Mr. Flournoy all about it and he was in the biggest trouble of his life.

When she did return she said, "I ought to send you to Mr. Flournoy"

Kester cried, "I'm sorry, I won't ever do that again!" Mr. Flournoy could put the fear of God in any student.

He hadn't done it on purpose, with the lizard just jumping out, and she never did send him to Mr. Flournoy. Maybe his sincerity of promising never to do it again swayed her. Maybe it was her making such a spectacle out of herself in front of the class.

In the fifth grade a real mean boy kept acting up and wasn't minding the teacher. She finally spanked him while another teacher held him. He was as strong as he was mean. When they finished, he started running out of the school, hollering as how he was going to go get his mother and she come and would "woop" the teachers. They knew he ment it too.

The mother, who happened to be part Indian, with a name something like Sticks, they knew was as mean as the son. So they stood on the school house porch, looking out toward the town. Sure enough, his mother was soon marching right toward them in a huff. She looked like a moving human wall and she was about five foot five and wide as tall. She ran up on the porch and commenced to hitting and biting both teachers. She knocked both of them down and kept hitting and biting them. Lola Will and her friends took off for the men teachers in another building and they came running. It took them all to subdue the fiery woman. They escorted her and her son off the school grounds. One of the teachers had a full bite profile of the woman's teeth imbedded in her arm, besides other bruises and scratches. The woman's husband was fired from his job in the mill that very day and they left town soon after, moving to Lufkin. Papaw didn't move them.

## Chapter Eight

The company store or commissary carried everything anyone could want. All kinds of spices for cooking, clothes, salt, sugar, canned goods. The clothes for men were mostly khaki pants and overalls with some dress pants and shirts and women's clothes. The store also served as a hardware store with a large tank under the store that stored coal oil to use for lanterns. There was a butcher shop attached that was run by Pop's uncle Hamp Wilson, Mamaw's brother.

Uncle Hamp would get most of his beef from the Renfro Ranch just west of Shawnee Prairie. The foreman was J.J.Ray. He had come over from being the foreman for Southern Pine Lumber Company's cattle operation in the western end of Angelina County where they ran as many as eight thousand head. Uncle Hamp would bring a couple head of cattle back from Renfro Prairie to Manning per week. Cold storage wasn't available to keep fresh large amounts of meat, so butchering went on all the time.

Uncle Hamp would use a 22 caliber rifle to shoot in the head the cow or hog brought in for meat. He would dress the animal, with the meat available in the commissary for the town's people.

The people would get paid by the mill in chits. These were little wooden coin like pieces with the Carter Kelly mark or symbol and came into use after the metal coins described earlier. They would then use these to buy food items and dry goods in the company store.

Most families had an ice box, which was the fore runner of the refrigerator. The ice box was a box at the top for the ice and the food stored below. The cold would flow down over the food below, keeping it fresh and edible.

Pop and his younger brother Joe would be sent about every other day to the ice house. It was a large building next to the commissary. Once or three times a week, depending on the season, the train would bring ice from the ice plant in Lufkin, about 20 miles away. Sometimes more often with usage, like during summer.

The ice was made at the ice plant in Lufkin in two hundred and fifty pound blocks. These would be carried by an insulated rail car to Manning three times a week and unloaded down a long wooden ramp from the car into the ice house. Pop and Joe loved to get there when a car was unloading so they could watch the action. The large pound blocks would be sent careening down the ramp and slide all the way to the back end of the ice house. All the ice house walls were stuffed in their middles with several inches of saw dust for insulation. Men with metal hooks would stick the ice blocks and drag them all through the house for storage. The large blocks were frozen with notches in them so they could readily be broken up into smaller blocks down to twenty five pounds.

Dad and Joe would be sent to get a twenty five pound block. It was tied with hemp twine and they would carry it home to put into the kitchen's ice box. The block got heavy to a couple of young boys carrying it home to the Dago Quarters. The men at the ice house

broke the ice blocks into hundred pound blocks. These would then be split into twenty five pound blocks to sell to the people to use in their houses. The ice boxes had a small compartment for the ice block at the top, and the cold air would flow down over the food in the box to keep it from spoiling.



## Old Manning scene in 1911

A few oldtimers in Angelina County should realize this photograph of part of the woods crew for the Carter-Kelley Lumber Company which was taken about 1911 at old Manning.

The crew was preparing to move from nearby Shawnee Prairie across the Neches River about one half mile into Tyler County near Rock Hill. The carts were loaded on railroad flatcars, but the mule teams were driven across a ford in the river.

The small building at left is identified as the feed house. Small building at right was the ice house and the large building at right was the commissary or company store.

Woods foreman at the time was W. M. Gibbs. The team boss was Consel Olds. Cart team drivers, or mule skippers, were Virgil Olds, Frank Dixon, Bud Dixon,

Dan Cameron, Will Ward, Cal Weaver, Jap Massey and Bank Peden.

Those who drove the bunching teams were Sam Woods, Thedford Russel, John Tatum, Lige Tatum and Jim Moore.

A Mr. Hughes owned and drove the pineknot wagon which supplied fuel for the steam engines. Jesse Jones was engineer on log train Number 3, and Horatio Havard drove the water cart.

The photograph has of course yellowed considerably, but perhaps you can see the mill pond, water tank and the sawmill itself in the background. Logs were dumped into the pond and fed into the mill by chain.

This picture was provided by Jim Olds, whose father, Ben Olds, kept the company corral at the time. Our thanks to John Cameron for obtaining the picture for publication.



## Chapter Nine

The railroad, named the Shreveport, Houston, and Gulf, kept Manning in touch with the outside world. The nearest town was Huntington, nine miles away. The twisting, rutted dirt road was a mess to travel in almost any kind of weather. The railroad flat beds and box cars would have SH&G lettered on the side. It was known all around as Shove Hard and Grunt. The rails ran straight and true and a wagon or 1920's era truck would easily get stuck on the rutted, muddy roads. Stuck as in not moving.

One time Lola Will Taylor and her family were traveling the ten miles into Huntington. They were about four miles from Manning when they slipped off the road in the wet, slick mud into the ditch. The whole family was dressed for town and stuck, wondering what to do. Mr. Taylor wondering whether to walk out in the mud for help.

Something in the early evening seemed to be wafting on the wind. It grew very slowly a little louder. In a while the words began to become more distinct as part of a gospel being sung. "On Jordan's rocky shore I'll stand.. I'm bound for the Promised Land, Lord, I'm bound for the promised Land. So who will come and go with me I am bound for the Promised Land."

It was Mr. Weaver driving his mule team toward them. He had a small farm along the road near the cutoff. It was called that because someone going to Manning had to cut off the main Huntington-Zavalla-Beaumont road to go to Manning.

He had been imbibing his home brew everyone called "shinney", and was three sheets to the wind, but singing the old hymn with vigor. Nevertheless he managed to hitch his team up to their car and pull them out to send them on their way. After getting them out Mr. Weaver kept going down the road singing and getting other people unstuck.

Where the railroad came into Manning there was the railroad roundhouse. This was where the locomotive engines and railcars were worked on and the locomotives were turned around to pull the cars back the other way. Further into town, just past the commissary was the railroad triangle. This is where cars and locomotives could also change direction by pulling through the triangle, then back down to the bottom of the triangle and then go back the desired way.

Whenever someone was being chased, especially if a boy was chasing a girl, the other kids would holler, "Head for the Roundhouse Nellie, he can't corner you there!"

The road that came from the cutoff and through Shawnee Prairie all the way to Manning was unpaved. As it came into the edge of Manning it crossed over the Iron Bridge that traversed over Brushy Creek on the east side of town.

Sometimes Dad and Joe would hop aboard one of the hand cars and take a ride on the rails. These were used by the railroad work crews and had a metal crank that a man on

each side would push and pull up and down to make the small platform handcar go. Dad said going uphill would really give a body a workout.

The rail cars pulling out of Manning would be full of freshly sawed, cured lumber and passengers. Or the cars would be pulled further south through Manning to cross a bridge across the Neches river to continue on to Camden, Texas. This town with another mill and forests were also owned by Carter. As time went on whole logs would be taken to Camden thirty miles away to be cut in the mill there because the forests there were being cut out, leaving only miles of stumps.

Saw Mill building, the left 1 ½ frames, logs cut up before going to the planer mill on the end. Last unattached building on the right was the company machine shop and blacksmith shop.



In 1928 there was a heavy snow fall blanketing the land and woods all around. Lola Will Powell said the snow covered trees behind the mill were beautiful to behold. After the snow the sky cleared and that morning, a Sunday, the morning sun made the snow laden branches look as if they were covered with shiny gold. Lola Will ran into the house shouting, "Come look at this!" Her family at first thought something was wrong, but she then showed them the sight outside.

## Chapter Ten

The school occupied a very important part of town life as so many families had children, and most knew the value of education for the future. The teachers were good. Mr. Day was the school superintendent for most of the 20's until 1929 when Mr. Flournoy became the head administrator and also taught classes himself, as did his wife Ruby. The kids were generally scared of Mr. Flournoy as he could look and act very stern, but they loved Mrs. Flournoy. She was gentle, kind, and sincere. Her care radiated in all she did.

One of the highlights for school kids during those days was going on a picnic down by a creek or the river. Box lunches would be packed and everyone would walk or ride a horse. The girls would dress up and fix box lunches. The boys would dress up and be on their best gentlemanly behavior. It was a chance to talk to girls in a pleasant setting away from the classroom and family settings.

The school with its classes full of children learning, the sawing, noisy, steaming machinery activity of the dominate saw mill buildings, the commissary supplying the town's people, the ice house, hotel, theater, the houses full of families, the men walking to and from the mill, the crews and mules in the woods with the tram lines snaking all through the tall woods, the logs being hauled to the mill, the streets with people and children walking everywhere, the churches, the black side of town mirroring all of this activity and culture in its own way, people and families moving in and moving out, visiting entertainers, the powerful mill steam whistle marking the times of work and day, all contributing to the belonging of every person to the community family that comprised Manning.

Dad said he liked to view the sawmill from Pumpkin Hill, looking over the trestle across the Mill pond, seeing the many steam exhaust stacks being discharged in spurts, then down to a trickle, then spurt again as the cylinder of the steam engine piston moved back and forth. The aroma of freshly cut pine logs into lumber and of the steam he would always remember.

Papaw had seen the mill start slowing down some. The woods were getting cut out more and more. The rails through the forest had to be laid further and further out. It was 1929 and he moved the family out on Shawnee Prairie.

When he planned to move from Manning, Papaw bought fifty acres out on Shawnee Prairie from his first cousin, Jim Jones. The fifty acres were next to Jim's land and Papaw built a three room shot gun house on it. It had a porch that went all across the front.

A drain pipe ran from the edge of one side of the roof, where the rain water would flow down through the pipe into a thirty foot deep well in the ground off to the east side of the house. The well was lined with brick with the bottom of natural clay down to where it had been dug. The other side of the tin roof drained to a metal cistern on that house side just



outside the kitchen. Papaw put a pipe from the cistern into the kitchen sink so with a turn of the spigot Mamaw would have running water in her kitchen. Even in the hottest summer the well water in the ground stayed cool where the metal cistern would be hot. Pop said both always tasted okay. The family took their baths in wash tubs in the yard with the girls on one side, the boys on the other.

The large metal cisterns were built by Sam Kerr's sheet metal shop in Lufkin. On the side of each one he stenciled SAM KERR MADE. They were found on homesteads all over East Texas.

When Pop and his family moved to Shawnee Prairie in 1929 he was ten years old. He and his brother and sisters walked a mile to the two room Shawnee Prairie School house. There grades from the second through the seventh were taught. There were two teachers and they taught all the grades. One took elementary and the other took from fifth through seventh, so there were several grades being taught in the same room.

The school house on the Prairie had been an old church building. The two rooms were divided up by blankets hung on frames to form four small enclosures in each larger room to better separate out the different grade levels. Mostly the kids all went barefoot. Pop remembers breaking ice in winter with his bare feet. They were tough and hardened.



School picture on the front steps of the Shawnee Prairie School. Children of various grades are shown, with Frank Woodard the Principal and Lois Morgan one of the teachers. Teacher Dave Modisette was a teacher who taught math and encouraged Dad to pursue becoming an engineer.

He and Gladys came back to school at Manning for grades eight through tenth. One year when Pop was going into the eighth grade a new teacher of literature and English moved in to start teaching at the Manning School. Her name was Wanda Newman. She was a beautiful brunette with olive skin, single, and played the violin and volunteered to do so at school and town functions. Pop and his friends were smitten.

But when she played her violin Pop and his group at first thought something was wrong with her left hand. When she played it shook at the end of the violin. They felt sorry for this beautiful, young woman they idolized, until someone told them how violins were played.

Miss Newman also loved to play tennis, but Manning didn't have a tennis court. Many there had never seen tennis being played, but Miss Newman wanted to play tennis. So Pop and his bunch of goggled eyed country boys, on a flat piece of ground near the school, scraped and raked and built Miss Newman a tennis court. She loved it and they loved watching her play.

A smoke house was built behind the house on the Prairie to store meat. The Prairie was where Papaw and his family really came into their own. The land was true prairie, unbroken sod with top soil up to three feet thick, built up over the millenniums with herds of buffalo and elk grazing and deepening the land's richness. The thick sod required a sixteen inch mold board plow. Two mules could barely pull it. Papaw hitched up three mules to it. Two were on a double trace and one on the right on a single trace, thus called a triple trace. The traces were hitched up so that all mules were pulling evenly. After the sod was turned they'd pull a disk over it to break it up for planting.

Papaw worked as hard as he ever did. He truck farmed vegetables, raised corn, cotton, sugar cane, peanuts, peas and hogs. Pop and Joe were tough as boots and expected to work from dawn to dark when school wasn't in session. Even during the school year they would help harness up the mules for the renters and had work after school. As Papaw grew the crops, hogs, and vegetables, he sold them; he and Pop would often take a wagon load of fresh vegetables into Manning and always sell completely out. People knew him and were always happy to buy fresh vegetables for their table at a good price. He would always finish up in the black quarters, and when he had pork meat he would always sell out there.

As he grew and sold crops Papaw acquired more land. It was the Great Depression and land could be had cheap, even five to eight dollars per acre, though money was hard to acquire for everyone.

As he acquired more acreage he took on renters. Some people would call them as sharecroppers. Champ Havard and Bill Bolen had worked with Papaw in Manning and came on the Prairie with him for years. They and Papaw built wooden houses for them and their families. He would provide the land, the seed and fertilizer and mules and equipment. They would work the land and they and Papaw would each take half the crop when it was sold in the fall. They grew cotton and sugar cane for cash crops and corn for feeding mules. They would raise gardens for themselves. There was also a family named Burris that sharecropped with Papaw for a few years.

The sharecroppers, as they were more properly known, farmed on Papaw's and other land owners' land. The land owner would furnish the land, seed, mules, plows and equipment, fertilizer, and a place to live for the sharecropper and his family. The sharecropper would furnish the labor and split the crop harvest with the landowner, thus the name sharecropper. At times its been used somewhat derogatory but it was a way to enable a man with little means to have a place to live, make a decent living for his family and consistently put good food on the table.

Jim Jones, Papaw's first cousin also had two renters. A large farmer who lived at the cutoff to Shawnee Prairie and Manning had five renters. He mostly worked with colored folk as renters.

Champ's father was Jim Havard. He had owned a large ranch between Manning and the Prairie. Jim's brother-in-law was Zeb Dixon. Jim was a good, hard working man, but his wife ran around on him something terrible. One morning Zeb came by to get Jim to go hunting with him. Jim was sitting on the porch swing with his wife standing on the porch with him. Zeb and his sister had cooked up a plan for Zeb to get rid of Jim while they were hunting. But Jim wouldn't go no matter how much they coaxed him to. He'd heard something was going on between the two. Finally Zeb raised his double barrel shot gun and blew Jim's chest all to hell, killing him. In the inquest Jim's wife, Zeb's sister, the only witness, said it was a case of self defense and they got away with it.

Champ told Pop and Joe that one day he was going to kill Zeb. Champ even bought a little old Saturday night special 38. But he knew he'd ruin his life and that of his family if he ever followed through and never did.

One of the renters was a young bachelor named Hallie Williams. He was a black man but Papaw treated him just the same as the others. Hallie was a hard worker and did a good job with the land he farmed. He also loved playing baseball and played backstop on the Prairie team along with the white boys. One time Woodrow Crane had relieved Hallie at backstop and getting ready to put on the mask Hallie had been using. He then refused saying it smelled with Hallie's sweat. That he wasn't going to use it after a black man had just done with it. They all just laughed, including Hallie.

Bill Bolen and Champ Havard had married sisters. Every year Bill would talk about leaving the Prairie and doing better. After the harvest he would pack up his family and head to Dallas. Times were hard and come early spring they would come back to work the land. But he was a good worker and Papaw always took him back.

Marshal Burnett had moved out onto the Prairie after he was so badly hurt in the long fall at the Manning mill. He had bought land on the Prairie and started farming. He had a renter everyone called Cussing Carter, because every other word was a cuss word. It didn't matter if it was just some normal everyday conversation, the cussing just flowed out.

Carter was a mean man. One year when Burnett tried to collect rent that Carter was way behind on, Carter jumped on Burnett and beat him to a bloody pulp. Burnett walked with a very pronounced limp due to the terrible accident he was in at the Manning mill and would be crippled the rest of his life, but that didn't matter to Carter.

Carter had a couple of children and one of them was a girl whom Dad's sister Gladys was very close with named Naomi. They would often sleep over at each other's homes. A year later due to Carter always being late with his rent, he was way behind now, always taking advantage of Burnett and just a tough man to have on his place, Burnett went over to tell Carter to get off his property. As soon as Cussing Carter heard Burnett telling him to get off he started to jump all over him as he had done before. Burnett was ready, pulling out a .45 pistol and shooting Carter right in the stomach. He bled profusely and died. Papaw went into town and testified on Burnett's behalf. Burnett was no-billed for the affair, meaning there were no charges, nothing.

Later while serving a nurse internship at Scott White Hospital in Temple, Texas, Mary Powell, Lola Will's sister, ran into Naomi also starting her nurse internship. Naomi would do well.

## Chapter Eleven

The 1920's had been a boom time for the United States. But now the Great Depression was upon the nation. Papaw worked very hard. He worked his family hard. When they weren't in school or doing their studies they were working. Saturday evening was a time off for camping or fishing though.

The Dust Bowl had begun to hit large parts of Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and eastern Colorado. Years of plowing and poor soil management, plus a prolonged drought brought on a multiple year disaster of blowing soil and farms lost. At the same time the nation was going through a prolonged massive economic downturn. When a huge tax increase and rampant speculation in the markets propped up by overextended credit collapsed the economy, demand fell drastically, causing factories to cut back or close, costing people their jobs. Farms bought on credit were repossessed by banks that backed them when prices for the farm crops and animals fell and continued falling. Then the drought hit and it got even worse. Out of the Dust Bowl areas two million people left their homes in search of better places, many to California. Fifteen percent of Oklahoma moved to California in search of a better life. Most stayed put though, and tried making the best of it against years of drought and blowing dust that got into everything, food, houses, clothes, lungs. One woman said, "Mom cleaned and cleaned, but the sand got into everything. Even when we went to bed the sheets would be gritty with sand." Some people, especially the very young, died of respiratory ailments caused by constantly breathing in the sand suspended in the air. George Cooper, growing up on a dairy near Alvin, Texas, south of Houston, remembered the dust being blown on the wind even down where he lived.

In 1932 Franklin Roosevelt was elected President and instituted his New Deal. It gave many hope and some government jobs such as through the Civilian Conservation Corps and other programs, but even as late as 1940, the unemployment rate in the U.S. still stood at 20%.

At times during the mid 30's Papaw made some money hiring himself and his mules to the government fixing roads. Papaw would direct the mules in pulling a metal scoop, called a slip. It had a handle beside the scoop Papaw could use to vary the depth of the blade that would smooth out dirt roads, kind of like grading them.

Papaw's younger brother Jacie was a conductor on the railroad running from Manning to Huntington. Some men convinced him to make them a key copy of the strong box on board, and they robbed the train. They were all arrested. Papaw hired J.J. Collins, a cousin, the best attorney in Lufkin, for Jacie, who had to turn state's evidence against the others to keep

out of jail. Mr. Collins' daughter married Ralph Zeleskey, who helped grow their law firm into the largest in that part of East Texas.

One summer while Jacie was living with them, Dad and Jacie felled pine trees on a three hundred acre block of land with a cross cut saw. A summer of long, hot days in hot, still woods.

The U.S. was a bit of an isolated continent of desperate peace in a world where war was already starting to rear its horrible head.

In 1931 Japan invaded Manchuria in China on a trumped up charge of a railway line at Mukden, Manchuria being blown up by Chinese saboteurs. Japanese agents had set the charge, and this became known as the Mukden Incident. The rail line wasn't even put out of action as a train moved over it just an hour later, but Japan used it as a reason to invade; and with air attacks, artillery, and infantry they took over Manchuria, killing many thousands, raping at will and taking over the Manchurian government, installing a puppet one.

When the League of Nations protested and voiced censure of Japan, the Japanese delegation basically told the League they would do what they thought best for their country and walked out of the League gathering. Japan continued their expansion into China for the next few years. The Japanese would militarily occupy Manchuria from then until the end of World War II.

In 1933 Adolph Hitler through manipulation of the aging Hindenburg, then President of Germany, and through manipulating the democratic election process in Germany managed to get himself into the position as Chancellor of Germany. He had been Chancellor fifty two days when he got the German Parliament to declare him fulfilling all the executive positions into his one office, making him in fact the dictator of Germany.

He soon dissolved the government and had absolute power. The majority of the German people and German industry followed him in his blind, maniacal ambitions as they too were mesmerized by heady visions of power and national redemption from the country wide restrictions and retributions imposed on them at the end of the First World War. Hitler rallied the German race around his lethally twisted arguments that the Jews were the reasons for German's problems. Slowly, systematic practices were implemented throughout German society that ostracized Germans who happened to be Jews. Jews had fought with great bravery and honor for Germany in the First World War with twelve thousand giving their lives for Germany, many more wounded, and thousands winning battlefield decorations.

In 1934 a resurgent Italy, that had in many ways escaped the worldwide economic depression, had been on a several year buildup of its army, air, and naval forces. Various weak governments failed and the Italian king asked an ambitious war veteran, journalist and political riser named Benito Mussolini to form a government. With Mussolini having already formed a rightist party the king feared possible civil war. Mussolini formed a government, a fascist one, eliminating any political opposition and gaining total control of the country. He modernized Italy's armed forces, making the economy more efficient and rooting out corruption.

His first conquest was the relatively poor country of Abyssinia in north eastern Africa. Italy's modern, mechanized army and air forces soon overran the nation, even dropping gas bombs outlawed by the Treaty of Versailles. The leader of Abyssinia, Haile Selassie, appealed to the League of Nations to no avail. His government escaped into exile.

## Chapter Twelve

In 1934 also saw Mr. Gibbs build the Country Club in Manning. It was a building with four rooms, with one of them a large dance floor where the teenagers and children could come and enjoy a good place to dance without having to leave the town. Pop remembers attending events there and having a great time.

On their Prairie farm Dad and Joe were put to work along with the rest of the family in planting, tending, and harvesting crops. That was their lively hood. Work seemed to be Papaw's life, from sunup to dark, he was always doing something. There was equipment to keep clean and repaired, animals to be fed, crops to be tended, crops to be harvested and sold, new land to be considered for buying, community activities to participate in, sharecroppers to coordinate with, on and on.

In the evening after supper Mamaw would often sit out on the porch with all the kids and they'd sing, just as they had done back in Manning. Old Joe Clark, Pretty Redwing, Old Black Joe, Suwannee River, some church hymns. Papaw usually didn't join them as he'd be catching up on the bookkeeping necessary for his farm operation finances.

Back on Shawnee Prairie Dad and Joe would usually get the job before school to help catch and dress up the plow mules in their traces for Papaw's renters. Everyone got up early. But Mamaw made sure everyone had a good breakfast and a hearty sack lunch to take to school.

Pop said a person just didn't see fat people during the Depression. Some kids would ask Pop what he brought for lunch and he'd show them. He said the reason they asked is some of them consistently brought very little to eat for lunch. They just didn't have it to bring. When he could he'd give them some of his. Mamaw would often pack Pop and the kids a bacon sandwich and a full potato. That would be a large meal to some of the kids. It was the Great Depression and times were hard. People worked hard there and were grateful for having enough to live and survive on. Some barely did.

Papaw and Mamaw believed in school. Mamaw had been a teacher and Papaw had gone to a commercial college to learn book keeping and basic business. He was very proud of his diploma from Perry Commercial College in Lufkin. It was all he could afford to go to, but he had made the best of it and used his learning there to become the bookkeeper at a large saw mill called the Boyinton Mill, about three miles southeast from Huntington.

In the seventh grade at the Shawnee school Pop had a teacher named David Modisette who noticed Pop's hard work and aptitude for math. "You ought to be an engineer," He told Pop. He would encourage him as the school year went on. Pop worked hard, for he liked math and he liked Mr. Modisette, who was a good, sincere teacher, traits kids picked up on.

Miss Moody was a teacher at the Shawnee school also. She had been raised in Huntington and met and married Hines Travis who was also a teacher. In years to come



they returned to teach at the Huntington schools and in later years taught myself and my brothers and sister at the school in Huntington.

Papaw was on the Shawnee Prairie School Board. As a young man Papaw had taken penmanship at Perry Commercial College in Lufkin. All the area schools would come to Papaw to make any certificates earned by the students during the school year and all the graduation certificates. He had a set of special pens and ink that his kids were never to touch. He took great pains with his classic writing and turned out beautiful, formal letters for the student names and awards on all the documents.

Sometimes those attending the Shawnee School would stop at Foster's store right near the little school house on the Prairie. It had gum, candy, double bubble, clothes, can goods, all kinds of dry goods. Lola Will Powell would get a friend coming on the bus to Manning to bring her double bubble gum. Mrs. Foster had four children. She and her husband Hoyt, ran the store. Dovey was Mrs. Foster. One was a daughter, Hallie, who was brain damaged when thrown from a horse when she was about eight years old. Pop's oldest sister Gladys, would sometimes visit and help Mrs. Foster in Hallie's care. Mrs. Foster cared for that daughter night and day until she passed away years later. Pop said if there was ever a Heaven for caring people, Dovey would definitely be there.

There was Chester, Clint and Bud Foster. Bud got engaged to a girl when he graduated right out of highschool but she was killed in a car wreck soon after. Bud never amounted to much and I admit in my youth I tended to look on him as the ner'do well he seemed to be, but didn't know about his lady and how much that might have adversely effected the rest of his life.

Pop had his own horse named Flaxey, who loved to run. He named her that because of her flaxen colored mane. She was the fastest horse on Shawnee Prairie. One of the most fun things for Pop to do when he was around fifteen was to get a wild horse and ride it in a freshly plowed field, the horse couldn't buck as hard and if he was thrown off the landing wouldn't be so hard. He didn't do that with Flaxey but with other horses that they were being broken. He had a reputation as being one of the best riders on the Prairie and able to tame horses.



Papaw bred mules by mating a female horse with a male jack, also known as a male donkey. The mating created a hybrid, which is what a mule is as a mule can't have young of its own. The mating made an animal very hardy, strong, and able to work hard all day; to stand the heat and insects better than other animals. They also earned their reputation, "stubborn as a mule.", though I personally didn't see that in the few I knew in my life. Papaw is shown here on the Prairie with a young mule colt.

One of the things Papaw couldn't stand was an animal abused in any way. He'd work them hard, but that was it. Some of the renters would get mad, especially at a mule that wouldn't do what they wanted and they'd grab the reins and

jerk down on them real hard, hurting, even bloodying their mouths. If Papaw saw any of the renters doing that he'd scold them. He couldn't stand to see an animal whipped either. If he saw that, he stopped it right quick. No one fooled with Papaw. He wasn't all that tall, but he was built like a tank and what he said went. He was the owner, the man in charge. He always made sure his animals were fed well, watered, and doctored when needed.

About this time Pop had a horse he was trying to catch to saddle and do some work. The horse kept shying and running away just as Pop would get up to him. This went on for some time with Pop hollering at the horse and chasing the animal. Finally he'd had it with that animal. Pop went and got a shotgun with bird shot. He was about fifty yards from the cantankerous horse when he let loose. The horse was pretty well stung with a few pellets just under the skin.

Papaw was furious and liked to have disowned Pop. After being read the riot act as only a very serious father can do, Pop never did that again. But, he never had a problem catching that horse again.

Papaw bought a goat ram that was a little bigger than a normal goat and had big curving horns. He bought it for curiosity mostly as he'd never had one. Pop didn't think Papaw knew the ram had a certain habit when he bought it. When a person turned their back on it the goat would charge and hit the person right in the rear. For awhile Papaw thought it was so funny, until it got a little too much and he sold the goat.

He had a herd of goats he hoped would eat out some of the thick underbrush and also that he could grow off and sell as he did his hogs. But at night some dogs roaming the area would attack the goats. Papaw tried to protect them by hunting the dogs with his trusty twelve gage shot gun, but the dogs chased the goats too far off for Papaw to get at good shot at them and soon the dogs killed most of them.

Papaw loved land. He was constantly seeking to add to his original fifty acres. He said he "only wanted what was adjoining me,". At his peak he'd gone from fifty acres to over four thousand. All acquired with money he made from what he grew and sold from his farm.

He was always going to build Mamaw a fine, new house further up on a rise in the pasture about a quarter mile behind their house among a grove of pecan trees. It was a beautiful site, but there was always equipment to buy or fix, new land to acquire, and it never got built.

Woodrow Crane and his family had moved to the west side of the Prairie on the edge of Renfro Pasture. It was a broad expanse of woods with three large creeks running through it. In it was an area they called the Clayton League. It was 640 acres and was the best squirrel hunting in the area. Papaw's younger brother, Jasie, and Pop would often go hunting there.

Three creeks ran through the Renfro Pasture, Buck, Little Buck, and Biloxi. Little Buck ran into Big Buck and Big Buck and Biloxi ran through the thick bottomlands into the Neches River. Pop and Joe had walked the length of Big Buck all the way through the thick bottomland woods to where it emptied into the Neches.

The Renfro Pasture was named for John Renfro who owned most of the acreage. John Renfro had once been a Texas State Representative. It was all part of his large ranch which was managed by Mr. J.J. Ray. Mr. Ray had been the foreman for Southern Pine and Lumber Company when they had a large cattle operation at one time over on the northwest side of Angelina County near the Neches River bottom. The Neches came on the west side of Angelina County down to just south of where Shawnee Prairie and Manning were. The Angelina River formed a border down the east side of the County.



Pop would ride Flaxey through the Renfro Pasture on a Sunday to help Mr. Ray run cattle. He'd ride through a faint trail through the thick woods until he came to where they worked the cattle. They'd pen them, castrate some male calves, move them from pasture to pasture. Pop was a good roper and rider and Mr. Ray enjoyed having him. Mr. Ray would point out some a calf that needed roping and Pop would spur Flaxey and she'd take off with Pop twirling the rope around his head, throwing it around the fleeing calf's neck. He'd then wrap the rope around his saddle horn, jump off Flaxey and go up to throw the calf on its side where they would tend to whatever needed doing.

Pop enjoyed filling up a Sunday afternoon with activity. Pop bought his cow dog one time but it ran around and disrupted things a bit and Mr. Ray asked Pop not to bring him back again.

To get to the Renfro Pasture woods and cattle operation Pop would ride Flaxey past the Ward place which was well off the small road up on a hill surrounded by prairie. Mr. Ward died soon after Pop moved to the Prairie. In a few years Papaw made Mrs. Ward an offer to her for her farm which she accepted. Papaw allowed her to continue living in her house and land until she passed away. Frank, her son, who continued living with her even as a grown man, was of rather low character, always voiced as how Papaw had gotten to his family in taking over their place.

The last place Pop would ride past on the way over to run cattle with Mr. Ray on Sunday would be Mr. Lekey's place. It was an unpainted, wooden house with a mud chimney. Pop remembered them building the chimney. The men would stir up a mix of mud with a certain consistency of soil and clay and mix it with moss. They'd pack it in a frame of sticks fitted together. After drying it stood straight and strong to last many years with many a fire built in its hearth. Mr. Lekey raised his family of three kids, his wife and himself on forty acres there.

Mamaw was big on her children attending Shawnee Prairie Baptist Church. Woodrow Crain's family was big on it too. At one well attended Wednesday night service the moon was bright outside with the preacher in the full force of his sermon. Woodrow started looking out the sanctuary windows at the moon, staring at its beauty. Soon a couple of others started looking out to see what Woodrow was looking at. They were joined by Pop and others. Soon half the congregation was staring out the church windows while the preacher struggled to keep the momentum through the rest of the sermon, and finally had to stop until he could get the people's attention focused back on him and the sermon.

Funkston Jim Havard, his wife Eva and family lived on their farm along the sandy road on the way to the Renfro Prairie. When ending the service the preacher at the Shawnee Church would often call on Eva to say the closing prayer. She really put her heart into it. She'd go on and on, sometimes it seemed for thirty minutes. Woodrow would sometimes utter "Amen!" beneath his breath as a joke and to try and speed things up. It didn't work, so he'd sneak out. Pop and Joe couldn't sneak out because Mamaw wouldn't have it.

Most Sundays found Pop's family at church, along with most folks on the Prairie. Except that Mamaw would often invite the preacher home to have lunch with them. Pop and Joe would get to fidgeting as they were eager to finish lunch and go fishing or ride horses. But they were expected to stay at the table until the preacher got through visiting and left. Mamaw's brother, R.E. Wilson, was a regular preacher at the church, but not the only one. He was a bachelor, and lived in Huntington until he later married a much younger woman and started his own church out from Huntington. It seemed no matter who Mamaw invited,

they all droned on with the prayer over lunch and seemed to discuss subjects infinitum with Mamaw throughout the dinner, making it last and last, or so it seemed.

On those Sunday mornings Pop or Joe would ring a couple of chicken's necks before church so they'd have them for a big lunch Mamaw would start getting together before they all headed to church. She'd put the chickens in the wood stove oven with a low fire where it would keep to be ready to fry or finish baking as soon as they came back from church.

Work depended on the season. Spring was for plowing and planting. Pop and Joe would walk barefooted behind the plow mules. He loved the feel of the soft earth beneath his feet. After a while the moist earth would cake up under his bare feet so it was just like walking on packed earth stuck under his feet.

Usually two mules would be used to pull a plow, directing them with Gee! For turning right and Haw! For turning left. Sometimes when pulling a heavy turning plow that would go deep and turn the sod up and over they would have two mules together and another on its own single tree or pulling brace connected to the tree or pulling brace of the other two mules so they all pulled together and were then able to pull the deep turning plow. It was called a moldboard as noted earlier. This was used to first turn the thick, virgin, prairie sod. Then the turned field would be disked to break up the thick, turned sod. After the plow came the fertilizing and planting. Seeds were put in hoppers which were all part of the planter. It opened up the prepared furrow, the seeds were fed from the hoppers and then a shallow metal piece would cover them up with a small roller to firm the soil over them. Corn was planted with seed saved from the previous year's crop.

As the plants came up all weeds were hoed out of them by hand; peas, cotton, peanuts, corn, or else the grass and weeds would take them over and destroy the crop. Some tilling could be done down the middle of the furrows but around the plants it was all done by hand; long row after long row, field after field, until all were done.

The days from early Spring till late fall were made up of school work, and hard, hot farm work. Cotton was the main cash crop. All the area farmers grew some cotton. Papaw and his renters grew a fair amount. Pop and Joe, along with the renters would "chop cotton" when it was a few inches high. This entailed using a hoe with a slender head to cut out those plants that were too close together and hoeing out any weeds. After the plants grew to near full size during the summer Dad and Joe would dust the plants with DDT to keep the boll weevils from destroying the crop. Boll weevils would suck the juice out of the green cotton bolls, destroying the cotton being produced. The insects multiplied very rapidly if not held in check.

The dusting by hand was done at night after the dew had fallen on the plants. They would each hold a sack of DDT powder over a row on either side as they walked down the row middle, shaking each sack over the rows of plants on either side. The dew caused the powder to stick to the leaves, protecting the plants. Doing this again and again over a couple of rows at a time all across a large field of cotton plants and their arms really got a workout. They did whole fields at a time.

Mildred, the second oldest girl, always helped Mamaw in the kitchen, preparing the meals, canning during canning time and cleaning up after meals. Beside chickens, hogs, and cattle for meat, they had vegetables out of the large garden Papaw always grew in which they all helped to plant and hoe out the weeds and harvest. Mamaw would can in glass jars the peas, beans, and other vegetables to be eaten in the winter. They also always kept a milk cow for daily milk. Pop said he liked his milk "warm right out of the cow."

With Mildred helping out in the kitchen, the other four girls chopped cotton, hoed the garden and pea plants, picked peas and cotton, dragging the increasingly heavy sacks behind them through the rows.

Pop and Joe were also expected to be able to hop all the fences on the Prairie. Papaw didn't want them climbing over the barbed wire or through it, to where it would have to be repaired or cattle could slip through it, which they would do, especially the calves. So Pop and Joe learned early how to grab hold of the top of the fence post and with a couple of short, fast steps fling themselves right over the tallest fence. They got to the point they could jump over a fence as high as they could reach.

Living on the Prairie, about half a mile off the Manning road, which Pop called, "The muddiest road in Angelina County" meant there was often an opportunity to help people. People were always getting stuck on it, and would often wind up walking to Pop's family's house to ask for help. Papaw always had a few mules in the pen near the house. He would wake Joe and Pop up and get them to help in hitching up the mules and pulling the people out.

Papaw continued running hogs in the woods. Back then, until Pop got close to leaving home for college most of the farmers ran their hogs on open the open range. This was generally the woods surrounding Shawnee Prairie and also the river and creek bottoms around Manning.

Papaw always carried a razor sharp knife, as most boys and men did, and would mark all of his hogs and cattle with certain cuts on their ears. On the left ear a small bit was taken out of the top and bottom with his knife and the very end was cut off straight. It was called, "over and under bit and crop on end." On the right ear about two thirds down the ear a cut was made from the bottom about half an inch up and then a straight cut from there to the end of the ear. It was called "undersquared on right." These healed quickly and anyone could tell they were Papaw's hogs or cattle wherever they were found. Papaw took off as little as possible, only to mark them. The animals needed their ears. The marks were registered at the Angelina County Court House under Papaw's name, unique to him. I guess marking was easier than branding and maybe more humane. But that's what was done.

Once Papaw and Pop were just below Manning rounding up their hogs to bring them back to the Prairie and mark the piglets born to the sows and now running with them. The adults they would fatten up back home and then sell.

They had built a small wooden pen in the woods to run them into. They drove down in a wagon with a couple of dogs that were really good at rounding up hogs. They got started. The dogs were getting the hogs together. One big boar with razor sharp tusks sticking out both sides of his mouth stood his ground in front of one of the sows with her piglets. He charged the nearest dog. He was lightning fast, violently whipping his head and tore into the dog, ripping all one side wide open. The dog collapsed with his guts falling out. Pop and Papaw found him just like that and gave up on hog gathering for the day. Pop cradled the dog's head in his lap while Papaw cut off some thin leather strips hanging off their saddles. I wondered about the boar ravaging the dog once it was down, but once the boar incapacitated the dog they all took off.

The dog didn't struggle or try to bite. He knew they were trying to help him. Papaw pushed the animal's guts back into him and held the skin together as he used his knife to

make small holes on either side of the long gash and sewed it all up with the leather strips. It took a while and the dog stayed perfectly still, whimpering only a little.

They wrapped him in a hemp toe sack, gently picked him up, put him in the wagon and took him back home. They fed and cared for him and over the next few weeks that dog got well and went back to working cattle and hogs.

They had some cow dogs with one being an especially great cow dog. He could round up just about any cow or groups of cows and herd them. One day when they were rounding up cattle on the Prairie a big, young bull didn't want to get with the program and took off from the group. Papaw sicked the dog on the bull to bring him back. Taking off at a dead run he caught up with the big bull and to Dad's amazement bit right into the bull's nose and with a downward jerk of the full weight of his body, caused the huge animal to flip head over heel right there in the pasture. The bull came up totally confused and suddenly docile. The dog then ran him right back into the herd with no more trouble.

Sometimes young dogs, due to an unbalanced diet probably, would run around in circles uncontrollably barking their heads off for several minutes, then go back to normal.

Papaw also grew peanuts. When they matured, he'd let the hogs in. One in ten of the hogs had a ring in its nose. Instinctively the ringed hog would root up the peanuts in the ground, but the ring would prevent him from eating them as easily. The rest of the hogs would feast on the raw peanuts, growing fat. The poor ringed hogs would continue rooting up row after row, trying to get to the peanuts, with the others swarming over the ones they dug up with their snouts, fattening up real well.

The peanuts that were planted for the hogs were called hog peanuts. They were larger with bigger husks and not as tasty as the Spanish variety Papaw planted for the family to eat.

Mamaw would roast some of the Spanish peanuts for snacking. She'd put them in the oven on a metal sheet until they were golden brown inside their husks. Delicious, with the family gorging themselves until none were left.

Papaw and his boys would round up the hogs. They would take a load to Fort Worth to sell at the Stock Yards. They were the huge, sprawling complex for receiving cattle and hogs. Traveling all day, spending the night, and coming back the next day, they always had a great trip.

Once Papaw took the entire family by pickup truck to the state fair in Dallas. They traveled all day at around thirty miles an hour. The kids had pallets of blankets in the back to lay in during the trip. They stopped on the way at a road side spring just north of Athens, Texas for water. The fair was a great adventure with exhibits, rides, and people from all over the state. The sights and sounds were a far cry from Shawnee Prairie and the family came back the next day.

As fall came on Manning had a forest festival. It was held on the Johnson Ranch about half way between Manning and Shawnee Prairie.

One of the events was for the boys to try to climb up and get a five dollar bill nailed to the top of a tall greased pole. That was a lot of money when men with families were earning barely a dollar a day. Several boys clamored together at the base of the pole, all trying to get up at the same time, but kept sliding back down. Papaw quietly told Pop to hold back a minute. The lower part of the pole started getting rubbed off by all the struggling boys.

Finally Pop ran over, jumped on it and locking his legs around it managed to force his way to the top and get the money. It went to Papaw for the family.

Fall was hog killing time, and in November up to fourteen hogs would be killed and butchered on hog killing days. Neighbors would come over to help out and take part in the butchering and pork harvest.

Papaw had a 22 pistol he'd use to shoot the hog in the head, killing it instantly. The hog's body would then be wrestled into a barrel of hot water dug into the ground. Pop's job was to keep that barrel full of hot water. The hot water loosened the hair. After a time the hog would be taken out of the barrel and the hair scraped off. Then the hog would be cut up. Very little wasn't used. Each side of the belly would make bacon sides, ham hocks, shoulders, even the hide was used. Mamaw and the girls would be busy getting all the meat ready to hang in the smoke house.

At hog killing time Memaw would make lye soap. She'd take a big tub or iron pot, fill it with water and throw in grease drippings and any hog pieces left over. Then she'd throw in a good measure of lye powder. Some people would use oak leaf ashes in place of lye. Memaw would start a hot fire under it and let it boil till in time a large head would form on the top of the water about four inches thick. Then she'd let it cool and lift it off as one piece and then cut it up into bars for the family to use for bathing and cleaning. Pop said it sure enough took the dirt off and the hide too. He said they wouldn't wash their faces with it as it would usually burn too much.

Earlier in the summer when they harvested watermelons to eat and sell, Papaw would always keep a couple of prime ones to use for a seed source for planting the following year. He would dare the kids to break into them, which they knew better.

Fall was also time for syrup making. They would always grow several acres of sugar cane in the lower acreages where the soil would be sure to stay fairly moist. Papaw was a firm believer in laying on good fertilizer as he knew the soil needed help in feeding the crops to make a good one. This was especially true with corn, cotton, and sugar cane. Some of the sugar cane they would take and bury it in a hole called a "bank", covering it with a layer of soil to preserve these as seed cane to plant for the cane crop the next year.

Some days during the summer Pop and Joe would take a wagon pulled by a couple of mules way back to the other side of Manning. They would go to where the old virgin forests had been all cut down. The stumps and large limbs would have centers full of rich pine resin. They called such pine wood left behind years later after the logging "rich lighter". It was very easy to start burning and would burn fierce hot. Papaw would take one wagon and Pop and Joe another to harvest rich lighter wood. After traveling around five miles, about a mile past Manning opposite the Shawnee Prairie side, would come to what they called the Jake Pond. It was a small depression in the land that held water even in midsummer. It was shallow enough that they would drive their wagon right into it, giving the mules a chance to drink and cool a bit. Mamaw would pack them a sack lunch which they would eat about then. Afterwards they'd go out in the logged over land and fill the wagon to the brim with rich lighter. They'd make this trip several times until they had enough rich lighter for syrup making.

Before the syrup making happened however, the cane had to be cut by cane knives welded by hand, mostly Pop and Joe's and some sharecroppers. The knives had wide blades with a small hook on the end to grab the stalks. They were kept razor sharp. The

stalks were then loaded on wagons to haul to the syrup mill. Once Pop missed the stalks and cut clean through his right big toe, as he was working barefooted. Mamaw wrapped it up and treated it. In a few weeks it was basically back to normal. But long before that, as soon as he could function at all he was back to work.

Once carried by wagon to their syrup mill there on the Prairie, the stalks were pushed through a vertical press. This was a round, metal cylinder through which the cane poles were fed and then crushed to get the rich juice out. A pole hitched to a mule walking in a circle powered the press in the center. Someone kept feeding cane stalks into the press. Keeping it pressing out the juice was important as the syrup pan needed a constant feed of cane juice.

Syrup making is a real skill. Mr. Youngblood came over from Nacogdoches County to live with them for three or four weeks while he oversaw the syrup making. A large copper pan with gates and channels several inches high all over its top was set atop a solid frame of bricks or stones. The plan was about fourteen feet long and seven foot wide. It was at a slight angle so gravity caused the juice to run at a slow pace through all the angles of the pan. Underneath a roaring fire would be going all day. Sugar cane juice was poured in from one end and flowed through all the channels, boiling off the water as it went, until finally reaching the end where it would be poured off as pure, rich, dark, golden brown ribbon cane syrup.

Mr. Youngblood knew just how to regulate the flow of the juice so the syrup would come out just right. He would rake off the foam that boiled up off the juice in the pan. It would contain bits of cane leaves and debris. He'd throw it into a small pit out from the pan.

The sugary debris, if set long enough, would ferment. Once while making syrup a mule and some hogs got into the sweet throwoffs in the pit without the men knowing. They had a great time lapping it up, getting drunk. The mule and one of the hogs wandered over to a nearby pond and inadvertently staggered in, drowning themselves in the process.

The syrup and cotton crops were very important sources of income for Pop's family. After all the hard work of planting, chopping, and dusting the cotton over the spring and summer the cotton would be picked in the fall. Cat Simmons, a black woman from Manning, would come every fall, bringing her large family and other friends to help gather in the crop. They were good workers and had a bunch of kids who all helped. She herself would expect to eat with the white folk's table when they all stopped for lunch, and she did.

Pop and Joe were together expected by Papaw to pick a bale of cotton every two days during the harvest season. It takes a whole bunch of hand picked cotton to add up to five hundred pounds. Leaning over picking the cotton, and pulling the sack behind as it got heavier made for real work. After Mamaw's hearty breakfast it was right out to the cotton fields with the emerging sun. The clear, mild morning quickly gave way to being soaked with sweat before nine o'clock. At times they moved forward on homemade knee pads, relieving their backs from the constant bending over. The picking didn't stop till dark. But at the end of the day a satisfaction set inside those who did this. Pop and Joe were paid just as the other pickers, money gained preciously, going into their savings.

Papaw a time or two was the first to harvest the first bale of cotton in the county and it would be carried to be put on display at Cotton Square in Lufkin.

On Saturday night Pop, Joe, and sometimes Woodrow Crane would go camping on Shawnee Creek or further west at Arkansas Lake right next to Renfro Prairie. They would pack some bacon, some potatoes to fry up and fry any fish they'd catch. They'd use throw

lines, lines with a hook and bait on it they'd throw out into the lake or creek to catch catfish and perch. A dry stick would be attached for a cork. They always had a fire for light and cooking and to help keep the mosquitoes at bay. Sometimes they'd hunt possums and raccoons. If Champ Havard was with them he'd skin the animal, taking it home to cook up for his family. This was the Great Depression.

They each carried a slingshot they made it out of strips of old rubber inner tubes sewed together with a square of leather to hold the pebbles they'd fire at birds or snakes or other things just for fun. They got real accurate with them. They didn't fire at too many birds as they didn't want to kill too many of them.

They always carried small rocks and pebbles in their pockets to use in their slingshots. Once while swimming in one of the ponds on the Prairie they discovered that striking two of the rocks together made a sound that traveled fast and far underwater.

Shawnee Prairie had enough people to have its own baseball team. Pop generally played backstop. Mamaw fixed him a mitt from some leather pieces. He had a kind of mask to protect his face. Mamaw made their team a ball by taking a piece of hemp toesack, putting cotton seed meal in the center and wrapping it tightly with cord. One summer they each came up with 5 cents to buy the cheapest ball they could find. It cost seventy five cents and just barely lasted the summer.

Manning was beating them in an important game, with Uncle Hamp Wilson, Mamaw's brother, as the umpire. The Manning backstop, Norman Buckner, called "Tooth" because he had a front tooth knocked out by a baseball, was really mouthing off to the Prairie batters as each came to the plate. Hurley Hales pitched for Manning that day and had struck out about a dozen Prairie boys. The score was 10 to 1 in favor of Manning, when finally one Prairie batter came to the plate, enduring Tooth's mouthing just so long, turned, and jumped on the Manning backstop. The Manning pitcher jumped on the Prairie batter and both teams jumped into the melee. It took Hamp Wilson and the adults several minutes to get it stopped.

One of the fellows on the Prairie everyone liked was a boy named Finn Tucker. He was adopted by Mr. and Mrs. Tucker who were renters of Jim Jones. They lived just past Papaw's place on a small trail through the pasture to their home and had a shed for storing hay for the animals. Finn was a big raw boned boy, strong as an ox, and one of the group of boys around the Prairie who loved to wrestle sometimes when they'd get together.

One day Finn was atop of a large load of hay being pulled into the shed by mules. Just as the mules pulled under the shed, before he knew it, a rafter had caught him right under the chin and forced his head back in a terrible bind. After that he started having epileptic fits. Everything would be fine and suddenly he would just stare into space and shake all over. It would last a couple of minutes or so and would happen four or five times a day. His parents took him to Scott and White Hospital in Temple, Texas and other places but back then nothing could be done for him.

After that, when wrestling, and if Finn had a fit they would just wait until it passed. But some wouldn't wrestle him anymore. In time the Tuckers moved away. Finn never married.

Woody, Frank's second wife, now his widow, and her five kids had moved into a small house Papaw had gotten together several neighbors to help build about a quarter mile from Papaw's family. During hog killing he also made sure she got many of the smaller cuts, and pieces others didn't necessarily want. Whenever he'd kill a hog he'd give her half of it and when he went to the store she often went along to get what she needed. Papaw without saying anything would always put her goods on his tab. Woody was grateful and she and her five children got by, thanks mostly to Papaw and Mamaw. This was before government programs funded by taxpayers or government debt.





Two sets of Poland Children on the Prairie. From back left: Jack, Robert, Maxie, Joe, Majorie, Thelma, Eugene, Mildred, Bill and Merlene (looking back), Gladys with Baby Don. (Jack, Thelma, Eugene, Bill and Don are Woody's kids. Woody is Frank's secondwife.) The rest are the children of Papaw and Mamaw Poland.

## Chapter Thirteen

One night on January 3, 1935, way up in early morning, Papaw had gone out to the front steps to make a pit stop. He came back into the house, woke up Mamaw, "Etta Dora, come out here. You'll see something you'll never see again in your life." He told her to get the kids, telling them all to come out to the front porch. "This is something you'll never see again in your lives." Dad looked out to the south toward Manning. The horizon was aglow with red and deep pinks and huge surges of flame. The saw mill at Manning was on fire. All those large buildings built with rich pine timber and connected were ablaze at once. They stood and watched it a long time. I don't think each of them couldn't help but think of the good years they had lived and worked and gone to school there. For Dad it had been school, friends, working with Papaw, activities, the sights and sounds of a booming town in America. Everyone in the town was involved in the common booming enterprise of the mill and the town and school that hummed about it. It was as living in an area of common interests with a huge, extended family.

Years later Pop would write on the front of a booklet of various people's reminiscences about Manning:

" I was there when the Whistle blew:  
I saw and lived Manning:  
Some of it, I remember;  
A part of it, I was."

I think even then, their thoughts were reflected in his words from so many years in the future.

Pop said that a week before the mill burned they had separated the saw mill building from the planer building. After the mill burned they shipped all the planer equipment to Camden. The Manning planer equipment was much more modern than the planer machines at Camden. Many people always thought the fire was set to collect on the insurance. There was also talk the night watchman set it.

Jess Jones was the railroad maintenance foreman for the Manning to Huntington line. His son went on to run the planer mill at Camden. Jesse Jones was married to Mr. Gibbs', the Manning mill, manager's sister. But everyone was leaving, and the town of Manning was quickly fading away. The Wetherford brothers, Needham and Rubin, who had been the wood foremen for the Manning Mill had also moved out to the Prairie to farm. However, during a thunderstorm one day while out in the field Rubin, the younger brother, was struck by lightning and killed.

As Pop got older Papaw and Pop would go into Lufkin on a Saturday where Papaw would conduct business and visit friends. He'd give Pop a quarter and Dad could get a hamburger and a coke for ten cents. He'd go to the local movie for ten cents, and afterwards get a full ice cream cone for five cents. Fun on Saturday night!

Papaw was civic minded and active in various community affairs and was on various County organizations at different times. He was good friends with most of the large land owners. He was also friends with a man who lived back in the woods near Arkansas Lake who had a quiet side business. Angelina County was a totally dry county so Papaw would occasionally visit at night and pick up a pint of liquor, for medicinal purposes.

When the mill at Manning burned in January 1935, Mr. Gibbs, the mill manager, soon moved to the Prairie, built a single story brick house near the Shawnee Prairie Baptist Church and right across the road built a cotton gin. It started operating about 1937. In the 1930's cotton was king in East Texas, being the region's main cash crop. Most farms throughout the area had a cotton crop. A lot of the work on the crop was done by man or mule with tractors gradually coming into use in the late '30s.



Papaw on the Prairie in the late '30s on a John Deere tractor with metal lug wheels.



Papaw and Mamaw

The first tractors had all metal wheels called lugs with large flange like blades positioned all around the wheel. Soon rubber wheels came into use and the John Deere Company produced a powerful two piston engine situated side by side that was started by spinning a fly wheel on the side of the machine by hand. If a person didn't watch it the engine would kick back while trying to start it and could break an arm. Everyone called the tractor a "Popping Johnny" because of the popping sound it made when running and the company who made it.

Before the Prairie gin, the cotton would be taken to one of the three gins in Huntington. One was Jorgon and Harvill, two men whose gin was powered by a large Fairbanks-Morris diesel engine. One was an electric mill owned by Mr. Wilson, Mamaw's uncle, and the other was McKewen's. The three gins were all busy during the fall harvest season.

Mr. Barge had a gin in Zavalla. William M. Gibbs was the saw mill manager in Manning and his two sons Ernest and Bud built the gin on the Prairie and Papaw started taking his cotton to the gin there. It was later bought out by Mr. Flournoy.

Shawnee Prairie was the largest, contiguous natural open area in East Texas. Its top soil was a rich loam some three feet thick in places laid down over millenniums by herds of wild animals continually fertilizing it and the deep, strong mat of grass growing all over it. Once the plow was put to it the land was perfect for cotton, corn, peanuts, sugar cane, vegetables and just about any type of crop.

Papaw, Dad, and Joe would spend some Fridays picking peas, cantaloupes, watermelons, and corn, loading it all up and hauling it that evening down to Beaumont's

Farmer's Market. They'd spend the night and be ready early that morning at the Market. People loved the fresh picked peas and produce and before the end of the day they would almost always sell totally out.

Papaw and Dad had hauled a large wagon load of raw cotton to Huntington one day before the Prairie gin was built. After their cotton was pulled out at the gin, Papaw and Pop went by the general store there. The store had just gotten in several bunches of bananas still on the stalk. That's the way they were delivered by truck then. Papaw bought a group cut off the stalk. He and Pop headed back to the Prairie. It was a long way back home. The mules had pulled the loaded wagon all the way to Huntington so they took it easy on them going home. Bananas were a rare treat. They each had one. They were so good. They each had another. By the time they got home that evening all the bananas had been eaten. Pop said the rest of the family, including Mamaw, would have loved a banana and were mad as wet hens.

After the Prairie gin had been operating that first fall, Mr. Gibbs let all the young people hold a big dance on the main working floor of the gin. It had a heavy wooden floor and was slick from the oil of the cotton seed, perfect for dancing. Mr. Gibbs had two beautiful daughters, Billie May and Doris. Billie May was a year younger than Dad.

Pop went back to Manning schools in the middle of the eighth grade. He and Gladys traveled together by bus to Manning. He switched to Huntington for the eleventh grade, his final school year, where he played basketball and was the class valedictorian out of seventeen in his graduating class.

Mamaw said Pop loved to be around any large truck that might come around the Prairie or that would be going into the woods, because he loved the throaty roar they made when they revved up their engine. Hot rodding on the farm!

Once he and Earl Jones took dates and drove down to where the Neches River crossed under the Beaumont Highway bridge. They all rode together in the cab of Earl's logging truck. Dad took Vergie Beatty and Earl's date was Lois Platt, whom he later married. They had a fine picnic on the grassy bank of the river and afterward they all went in swimming.

Papaw got with Mr. Gibbs and Pop worked at the gin during the harvest season, operating the powerful suction pipe that forcefully pulled the cotton out of the wagons lined up to come unload their harvest. Pop worked there a couple of harvest seasons, wrestling that heavy pipe, climbing over the sinking cotton loads, hot and dusty. Pop even worked there after his freshman year at A&M until he had to go back for the fall semester.

Papaw was the local election judge for the Prairie. The election was held at Gibb's store across from the church. Ner' do well Frank Ward, was a local drunk and just mean man. He had come into the store liquored up. He always carried a very sharp pocket knife. He sat down and started cutting up a spool of hemp cord. Everyone was afraid to stop him. The election was on. He would cuss from time to time. Papaw as the election judge didn't want that with women and children around. He asked the man to leave and when he didn't Papaw grabbed him by the arm to pull him out of the store. The man reached up with his knife and made a vicious cut right across Papaw's throat. It was cold that November election day and thank God Papaw was wearing a coat with a high thick leather collar. Frank's knife cut easily through the collar and into Papaw's neck all the way from the right ear down to his throat, but was stopped just enough by the collar to save his life. The man was arrested, Papaw was taken to the doctor, and carried a large scar down across the left side of his neck the rest of

his life. Frank Ward was sent up to prison, serving five years, with threats that he would someday get Papaw. Until Frank died Papaw always carried a double barreled 12 gauge shotgun laying right beside him in the seat of his truck, ready to pick up at a moment's notice.

There were farms all along the road from the Prairie to the Cut Off. The Beatty place, the Weaver farm, and others. Right at the cut off was a large farm similar to Papaw's owned by Mr. W.O. Gainer. He and Papaw were good friends. Mr. Gainer had three or four renters like Papaw. Most of his were black folk and did a good job for him. When he passed in his will he left the land they worked to their kids.

Mr. Gainer believed in getting by with as much savings as possible. He was reluctant to use fertilizer, which Papaw really believed in. "I don't need to worry about that", he'd say. All I care about is what's taken to the gin." Meaning if he could produced cotton from the rich Prairie land without fertilizing all he took to the gin was more profitable. In time though he came to realize the value of fertilizer, because cotton really took the nutrients out of the land.

In time Woodrow Crain reached the age where he acquired a car. He was a year or so older than Pop, started driving on his own, and loved to drive fast. The unpaved road through the Prairie from Manning made a sharp left turn in front of Papaw's house. Woodrow loved to run into it at high speed, spinning his wheels and throwing up curtains of sand as he wheeled precariously around the curve. Papaw told him more than once he must stop that as there were children playing at their house and it was very dangerous for him to be doing that. Woodrow continued roaring down the straight lane toward their house and rushing around the hairpin turn in front of their pond which was right next to the house. Papaw told him if he didn't stop doing that he, Papaw, would do something about it.

The next time Papaw heard Woodrow rev up his engine down that lane, getting ready to barrel around the turn, Papaw was ready. He rushed out with his double barrel twelve gage shot gun, standing right where Woodrow would just come out of the turn to speed up, and blew out both back tires of Woodrow's car. Woodrow limped home on the rims. That night Woodrow came back with Mr. Crain but Papaw wouldn't be cowed. What Woodrow did after repeated warnings was very dangerous to Papaw's family and he put an end to it. Woodrow and Mr. Crain left with Papaw sticking to his guns.

A few years later while driving in New Mexico in a brand new pickup he had bought, Woodrow was killed in a wreck. They brought him home and he was buried in the Crain Cemetery down near the Neches River bottom. A small picture of Woodrow is on the gravestone. Pop always considered him a friend and still does to this day.

A boy of fourteen in North Texas from a family of sharecroppers with twelve children near Celeste, Texas; asked a neighbor, Dial Henley, for four shells for the boy's old single shot 22 rifle. The boy, all of 110 lbs at 5 ft. 5 in., had dropped out of school in the fifth grade in 1936 when his father left the family, earning a dollar a day working for neighboring farms, plowing and picking cotton. His mother died when he turned 16. The neighbor gave the boy the four shells. The young man came back later that day with four rabbits. When the neighbor commented that the boy never missed what he shot at, Audie Murphy replied, "Well Dial, if I don't hit what I shoot at, my family won't eat today." \*

\*Initially all the services turned him down until the Army finally took him in in June, 1942, a few days after his eighteenth birthday. Fainting in basic training, the Army tried sending him to cooks and bakers school. He refused and fought to get into an infantry unit. Audie Murphy became the highest decorated American Serviceman of World War II, earning 32 medals for valor in combat, including the Medal of Honor. He disliked the identity of the most decorated soldier because he said so many others were also deserving but were unknown or killed.

## Chapter Fourteen

Papaw wanted all his kids to attend college. Papaw had attended Perry's business college in Lufkin, Mamaw had been a school teacher and they knew the value of education.

Pop attended Huntington high school for the eleventh grade, his last year in high school. Papaw thought he might get a better education there as Manning was starting to break apart as a town and community. He played basketball at Huntington. Back then, after each play they brought the ball back to center court and jumped for possession, each time. Pop said most of what they would practice for was to get the jump ball. Now days a jump ball is usually done only at the start of a game or half. Pop loved basketball. Huntington was the first school that had the facilities he could play it. He wasn't so tall, but was fast and handled the ball well.

He and WT "Lip" Thomas were the guards on the team. Everyone called WT "Lip" because he always talked so much. Pop wasn't very tall but he was fast, scrappy, and had a very effective bank shot when he charged the basket that was hard to guard against.

One of the teams they often played was the little community of Moffitt, northeast of Lufkin, near the Angelina River bottom. They had great games at Moffitt School, which had a unique gymnasium made out of logs.

Papaw's girls attended TWC, Texas Women's College, and his boys were going to attend Texas A&M College, it stood for Texas Agriculture and Mechanical College. Girls to a girls school, boys to a boys school. In 1937, with Pop graduated from high school, it was time to go on to college.

The oldest child, Gladys, was already attending TWC. Papaw talked to Pop about how he couldn't afford to send them both this year, so Pop said he would stay out a year and see if he could go the next year.

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The basic national isolation of the United States continued, but the danger of the aggressors on the world stage continued expanding their mass disruption of people's lives.

In 1937 the Japanese continued their naked aggression by attacking China beyond Manchuria. By the end of that year they had overrun most of Northern China. Then Shanghai was besieged for three months. The true face of the Japanese military showed itself when they attacked Nanking in China, raping and murdering some 300,000 Chinese civilians over the course of six weeks. Japanese soldiers were rewarded if they beheaded one hundred or more Chinese in one day.

*That same year, 1937, even an American gunboat was sunk in China by the marauding Japanese with 37 American sailors killed. Though Japan issued an immediate and profuse apology, President Roosevelt wanted to implant a naval blockade of Japan. But Great Britain wouldn't hear of it, fearing it would incite war.*

The Spain Francisco Franco formed a fascist government and civil war broke out between his faction and those of socialists and communists. Stalin of the Soviet Union actively supported Republicans as the leftists were called and Hitler in Germany supplied Franco's forces with advisors, and modern planes, tanks and weapons. It was a good proving ground for such tactics and weapons. Franco's forces steadily prevailed and at the end of March 1939, having pushed the Republican forces into a corner of the country near Barcelona, the leftists finally gave in and Franco declared his government over Spain. During the often brutal civil war the weapons and tactics to be used in the coming conflagration were honed. Hitler took strong notice that France and Britain stayed out of the conflict. The Winds of War were gathering strength across the world.

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On October 3, 1935 fascist Italy attacked Abyssinia (Ethiopia today), with the war there lasting until 19 February 1937. Italy had been badly defeated before in March, 1896 by the Ethiopian emperor, Menelik II at the Battle of Adowa when the Italians previously invaded Abyssinia-as they referred to their country. The Italians were defeated in that battle by superior numbers as the Ethiopians were also given arms by Russia and France then. Then planes and tanks were not part of war.

Now, the Italians attacked with armor, well armed troops with artillery, and had immediate mastery of the air from which they strafed Ethiopian troops. They dropped bombs, even gas bombs in violation of international treaties and met horse mounted calvary with tanks. Hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians, both soldiers and civilians were killed and injured.

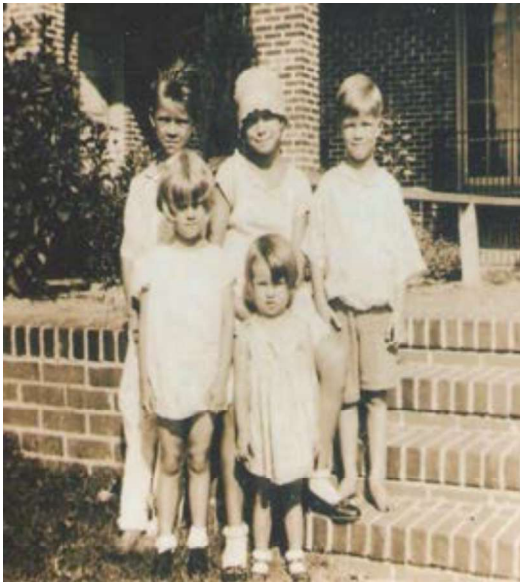
Italy captured the capital Addis Ababa on 5 May 1936. Haile Selassie, from a long line of emperors ruling Abyssinia, was force into exile and addressed the League of Nations on 7 June 1936. There were sanctions proposed against Italy for its aggressive attack, but they were very weakly addressed and soon dropped. Italy had been on the side of the Allies in World War I but at the Paris Peace Conference at the end of the War had not been given the lands she had been promised in the settlement of the war. Italy already had colonial power over Eritrea and Italian Somaliland bordering Ethiopia, and with the conquering of Abyssinia it was consolidated into Italian East Africa. Continuing guerrilla activity kept Italian control from being total, but by 1940 they were in complete control of three quarters of the country. This was the height of the Italian dictator Mussolini's power and reach.



## Chapter Fifteen

Mom was born March 24, 1924 in Jacksonville, Texas. Her father worked for the railroad and they moved with his work through various small towns in the surrounding area, including Palestine, Texas. When the Great Depression hit he had a good job that was steady and supported the family.

The only thing overriding the family was that my grandfather was a severe alcoholic. Today there would be treatments and even medicine for him, back then it was too often looked on as a weakness of character.



Back: Drummond, Orell, Charles (whom I'm named after)

Front: Mom and Aunt Mary

Things didn't get any better, and when Mom was still young, around five or six, while my grandfather was away to work one night, Mamaw Slover, Mom's Mom, gathered up herself and all five kids and they left him. They never went back nor saw him again.

They moved to Lufkin and spent the next six weeks living on the porch of Mamaw Slover's Mother, my great grandmother Frazell. Soon they rented a small house across from Gibson's Funeral home in downtown Lufkin, with all five kids enrolling in school. They were

all smart, with good personalities and as they progressed through the grades they quickly became a part of the school and community with many friends. As Mom progressed into the ninth grade and further her grades stayed very high. She became a three year member of the National Honor Society. By the time she finished high school at sixteen she had had three years of Latin, all the math, English, and science that Lufkin High School had to offer.

Mamaw Slover worked at a vegetable cannery the government had built there in Lufkin, earning a dollar a day. The Depression was on the land and nation, but their little house with the wooden ginger bread trim at its corners was a hot bed of children activity with friends coming and going. Willie Smelly would climb over the backyard fence every morning before school to help eat the biscuits Mamaw Slover would fix each morning. He and Uncle Charles were fast friends. "Thick as thieves," as Willie would say.

Years later a lady from Lufkin was attending a big social function at a River Oaks mansion in Houston, River Oaks being the highest income neighborhood in Houston. The lady walked up to the front door and knocked on it. Willie Smelly answered it. "Willie, what're you doing here?" the lady asked incredulously. "I live here." Willie answered. Willie had done well since living poor in Lufkin. He owned his own very successful insurance holding company in Houston, lived in River Oaks, and owned a large ranch west of the city.

The few kids in Lufkin who were part of well off families were close friends with the rest of the kids as most were in the same boat, and the well off kids didn't act like it.

Mom and her family lived in the little rent house right across from the funeral home. The two Gibson boys were about the same age as Uncle Charles. One day he was visiting the Gibson brothers there at their family business. They were walking through the back of the large building where the embalming was done. One of the brothers walked on ahead and Charles followed, walking through a dark, narrow passageway when suddenly a body came at him from out of the darkness, scaring him to death. One of the brothers had waited in the wings with a cadaver and pushed it on Uncle Charles. They got a big kick out of that.

A lot of kids lived in their neighborhood. She remembered one boy who had a lazy dog. Whenever he'd go somewhere he always took his dog with him. He'd drape his pet's front paws over his shoulders and tuck the dog's back feet into his hind pockets and carry him home that way.

Mom and her family had a dog named Spot. He fit right in with all the family activity. A man who didn't like dogs went through their neighborhood spreading poison, resulting in over thirty dogs being killed, including Spot.

The oldest of the children, Drummond, played football and was tough as a boot. Even his coach, Abe Martin, whose name today graces the Lufkin High stadium, called him "rough." He wasn't very big by today's player sizes, weighing only one hundred sixty pounds, but he was all muscle. He did so well he got a full scholarship to Texas Christian University in Ft. Worth, where he got a degree in geology.

Uncle Charles also played football mainly to participate in sports and also because Drummond did. Charles had excellent grades and when he graduated got accepted to Texas Agriculture and Mechanical College at College Station. He figured there at least he would save on having to buy clothes as they always wore uniforms furnished by the military. He borrowed some money from Mrs. Gladys Dupre in order to go to college. She was the very well off mother of a classmate of Charles'. Charles majored in mechanical engineering.

Two of Mom's classmates, Dan Spivey and W. D. Thames said they were going to be doctors, and Mom always said she was going to be a nurse. So they did. Mom graduated at

sixteen and left Lufkin for the largest hospital, John Peter Smith, in the Ft. Worth area to enter nursing school. She left in early September and didn't come home until right before Christmas.

Not too long after entering a very demanding regime of classes and hands on medical scunt work with patients, she was doing very well in her courses. Once she had scored very high on a test in a psychology course taught by a staff psychiatrist. Mom was shocked when the man rushed up to where she was sitting and gave her a big hug right in front of the whole class.



Mom at about eighteen. A picture she took while she was in nursing school and sent to her Mom and sister Mary.

## Chapter Sixteen

Jews had long been persecuted across Europe and especially by the Russians dating back to the early nineteenth century, they'd settled easily into the newly sculpted nations of Europe after the First World War and the collapse of the German, Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires, rising to prominence in manufacturing, medicine, education, science, the arts, culture, and other key roles in society especially economically.

When the Roman emperors started converting to Christianity, they began to see Jews, who didn't accept Jesus as the Messiah, as a threat and passed restrictive laws called Theodosian and Justinian Codes. In A.D. 399 Jews couldn't marry Christians. In 439 Jews couldn't hold positions in government, and in 531 Jews couldn't appear as witnesses against Christians in court.

In the Middle Ages many societies forced Jews to live in segregated ghettos and wear special clothing.

The Catholic church didn't allow Jews to own land, so Jews couldn't build up wealth through property. The church also didn't let Christians lend money for profit, Jews could, so they turned to money lending to build wealth. This contributed to the stereotype of the greedy Jew as many money lenders were Jewish by necessity. Many extravagant Christian cathedrals and armies were financed by Jewish money.

With the advent of Islam starting in 610 A.D. from the Arabian Peninsula, Muslims spread their religion over the coming generations by conversion and also in many areas mainly by systematic violent conversion. If you didn't convert to Islam, they killed you or extracted a putative tax from then on. Jews and Christians who didn't convert were banished or reduced in number by violence all over the Middle East and North Africa. For quite a few years countries and kingdoms all around the periphery of Europe fought to keep the Muslims from taking over.

By the 11<sup>th</sup> Century Christianity dominated Europe, with the main minority religion being Judaism, seemingly the only outside group the church couldn't convert. By this time the Christian church was teaching that the Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus.

During the 14<sup>th</sup> Century the bubonic plague swept Europe, killing one third of the population. Not knowing the scientific reason for the disease, the Christian populace started blaming Jews, accusing them of poisoning the wells to spread the disease. Jews didn't seem to die in the numbers other groups did, because they were more isolated in ghettos and cleaned themselves better and as part of their rituals washed the bodies of their dead,

helping to impede the disease's transfer. Tens of thousands of Jews were burned alive, especially in the provinces of Germany and France.

In Czarist Russia the Jewish people were systemically persecuted for centuries in the infamous pogroms. However, in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Christian values, principles, generosity, sacrifice, and search for justice embodied in the Allied governments, except for the hegemonic Soviets, was what led the fight for freedom during this World War II conflict.

As Hitler rose to power, Jews were systematically excluded from political, economic, and social life. Germans from all walks of life that had lived happily beside Jewish families and whose children played and went to school together for years and did business together were suddenly harassing and taking over Jewish homes and property as Jewish families were suddenly forced out with little to no notice, and confined to the poorest districts, banning them from the happy lives they had known and worked hard to build up for themselves and their children.

This was even happening with Jewish families whose men had fought gallantly and bravely in World War I for their country of Germany, many thousands giving their lives and many thousands more being wounded in battle.

This was all brought about by the methodical infusion of Hitler who in 1925 laid down his manifesto in *Mein Kampf* and continually indoctrinated the Nazi Party and the German people who fell into lock step with their Fuhrer, collectively obsessed with redeeming their German Reich and people pride from the defeat of the recent war, and blaming all their troubles on the world wide Jewish conspiracy and within their own midst.

Hitler used this historically, terrible, false narrative as a way to rally the German people around his Nazi cause and instill in the Germans a reason for their troubles brought about by the Great Depression's economic hardships. He appealed to a massive national ego of the nation's people by having a twisted, lustful power playing out in increasingly brutal suppression of fellow Germans and others in neighboring countries who happened to be of a certain religion. Also anyone deemed unfit; the disabled and mentally ill, Gypsies, homosexuals, and anyone seen as any threat to the Aryan race purity. This was a national power trip over others gone massively wrong.

When Hitler, using the democratic system of Germany, became Chancellor of Germany in 1933 and consolidated his power into an absolute dictatorship, established the first concentration camp. By the end of that year there were over 50 such camps.

On September 15, 1935, the Nazi government passed two new racial laws at their annual NSDAP Reich Party Congress in Nuremberg, Germany. These two laws (the Reich Citizenship Law and the Law to Protect German Blood and Honor) became collectively known as the Nuremberg Laws. There were previous restrictive laws that these two added to and codified.

These laws took German citizenship away from Jews and outlawed both marriage and sex between Jews and non-Jews. Unlike historical anti-Semitism, the Nuremberg Laws defined Jewishness by heredity (race) rather than by practice (religion).

The Nuremberg Laws were implemented and mercilessly enforced. Jews were stripped of their citizenship. Aryans were prohibited from employing Jews. Jews were barred from their

professions as lawyers, doctors, journalists and Jewish children couldn't be educated beyond the age of fourteen.

Public parks, playgrounds, rivers, swimming pools, beaches and libraries were now out of bounds to Jews. The names of all Jewish soldiers who had fought died and been wounded in service of the Fatherland were scratched off First World War memorials. This horrific ideology was instituted not only in Germany but in each country and region where the Nazi war machine spread its control.

In November 1938, a distraught seventeen year old son of a family of Polish Jews who'd been forced from their home assassinated the Secretary of the German Embassy in Paris, Ernst vom Rath. In revenge, the Nazi high command ordered Reichspogromnacht, known as Kristallnacht – "Crystal Night", the Night of Broken Glass". On the night of November 9-10, thousands of Jewish homes, historic synagogues, and businesses in Germany were targeted with homes ransacked, Jews were severely beaten, businesses attacked, Synagogues burned, at least ninety people murdered and 30,000 arrested.

Reinhard Heydrich, deputy to Himmler, the Gestapo head, was one of the organizers of *Kristallnacht*, a pogrom against Jews throughout Germany on the night of 9–10 November 1938. Heydrich sent a telegram that night to various SD and Gestapo offices, helping to co-ordinate the pogrom with the SS, SD, Gestapo, uniformed police (Orpo), SA, Nazi party officials, and even the fire departments. It talks about permitting arson and destroying Jewish businesses and synagogues, and orders the confiscation of all "archival material" out of Jewish community centers and synagogues. The telegram ordered that "as many Jews – particularly affluent Jews – are to be arrested in all districts as can be accommodated in existing detention facilities ... Immediately after the arrests have been carried out, the appropriate concentration camps should be contacted to place the Jews into camps as quickly as possible." Twenty thousand Jews were sent to concentration camps in the days immediately following; *Kristallnacht* signaled the beginning of the Holocaust.

A precursor of the death camps designed to purify the German Aryan race began in 1939 at the Hadamar Euthanasia Centre (German: NS-Tötungsanstalt Hadamar) located at a psychiatric hospital in the German town of Hadamar, near Limburg in Hesse. The Nazis used this site as one of six for the T-4 Euthanasia Programme, performing mass sterilizations and mass murder of "undesirable" members of German society, specifically those with physical and mental disabilities. In total, an estimated 200,000 people were killed at these facilities, including thousands of children. Nearly 15,000 German citizens were transported to the hospital and died there, most killed in a gas chamber. Hundreds of forced laborers from Poland and other countries were killed there.

Developed by Viktor Brack, it began mass sterilizations of children deemed unfit to reproduce, then started exterminating children deemed unfit and expanded to adults. After a brief period of suspension in 1942 due to popular opposition, the killings resumed to include German patients with disabilities, mentally-disoriented elderly persons from bombed out areas, "half Jewish" children from welfare institutions, psychologically or physically disabled forced laborers and their children, German soldiers and foreign Waffen SS soldiers deemed psychologically incurable. The crematorium there wasn't very efficient with bodies being burnt two at a time, and a dark smog of smoke overhung the city around the hospital.

In March 1938 Hitler annexed Austria in what was known as the Anschluss. Keen to placate Hitler so soon after the horrors of the last war, the British Prime Minister Neville

Chamberlain led international talks, without Soviet or Czech involvement, giving Hitler permission to occupy the north, south, and west of Czechoslovakia collectively known as the Sudetenland, mostly inhabited by German speaking Czechs.

In that same Month, Hitler pressured the fractured government of Slovak State led by President Hacha and then soon Monsignor Jozef Tiso to German terms for the Slovak State to come under the “protection” of Germany. Tiso and his collaborationist government agreed. With widespread resistance to this surrender, German troops marched in and the Czech nation was declared the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

When Hitler asked for a pretext for the invasion of Poland in 1939, Himmler, Heydrich, and Heinrich Müller masterminded a false flag plan code-named Operation *Himmler*. It involved a fake attack on the German radio station at Gleiwitz on 31 August 1939. Heydrich masterminded the plan and toured the site, which was about four miles from the Polish border. Wearing Polish uniforms, 150 German troops carried out several attacks along the border. Hitler used the ruse as an excuse to launch his invasion.

The invasion of Poland, known in Poland as the Defensive War, started on September 1, 1939, one week after the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, a non-aggression agreement between Nazi German and the Soviet Union. Two days later France and England declared war on Germany.



Ten-year-old Polish girl Kazimiera Mika in horrid bewilderment and shock at the sudden death of her older sister, caused by strafing German aircraft while she worked in a field near Warsaw. Photo: Julien Bryan - Poland, 13 September 1939. This is the true face of war.



Polish mothers with their newborn infants in a makeshift maternity ward inside a hospital basement during the Bombing of Warsaw by the German *Luftwaffe*.



## Chapter Seventeen

In a speech to his commanders, Hitler on 22 August, 1939 said to treat the people of the occupied countries mercilessly and without compassion, men, women, and children. That “Only thus shall we gain the living space which we need. Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?”

One and a half million Armenians had been murdered by Turkish forces starting in 1915. This came about after a Turkish military disaster when the Turkish army attacked Russian forces through the mountains of Armenia in the winter during the battle and on the retreat lost 66,000 troops. In a knee jerk effort to cover up the disaster by the Young Turks, particularly Ismail Enver Pasha, Ministry of War and defacto Commander in Chief; in trying to shift the blame for the Turkish losses, saying the Armenians were colluding with the Russians, killed Armenians en mass by Turkish killer squads, starved to death, and forced marched them without provisions to the Middle East. The Armenians were Christian and the Turks Muslim which seemed to enervate the Turkish brutality.

On May 19, 1916 Enver Pasha said, “The Ottoman Empire should be cleaned up of the Armenians and the Lebanese. We have destroyed the former by the sword, we shall destroy the latter through starvation.” Talaat Pasha, who became Turkey’s Interior Minister in 1913, had developed plans to eliminate the Armenians as early as 1910 as he had told Danish philologist Johannes Østrup at the time. The Turkish military were often advised by on site German officers as they were allies during World War I, but the mass slaughter was instigated and carried out by the Turks themselves.

Henry Morgenthau Sr., the ambassador to the Ottoman Empire during World War I, said in 1919:

“When the Turkish authorities gave the orders for these deportations, they were merely giving the death warrant to a whole race; they understood this well, the great massacres and persecutions of the past seem almost insignificant when compared to the sufferings of the Armenian race in 1915.”

As acclaimed historian David Fromkin put it in his book on the Ottoman Empire’s downfall, *A Peace to End All Peace*. “Rape and beating were commonplace. Those who were not killed at once were driven through mountains and deserts without food, drink or shelter. Hundreds of thousands of Armenians eventually succumbed or were killed .”

On the eve of World War I, there were two million Armenians in the declining Ottoman Empire. By 1922, there were fewer than 400,000. The others — some 1.5 million — were killed in what historians certainly consider a genocide.

In 1918 Morgenthau gave public speeches in the United States warning that the Greeks and Assyrians were being subjected to the "same methods" of deportation and "wholesale massacre" as the Armenians, and that two million Armenians, Greeks, and Assyrians had already perished.

“The Greek inhabitants of Turkey were, of course, citizens of the empire. They built military roads, erected barracks, and performed other tasks of manual labor behind the lines.

They were subjected to iron discipline, as the Turks regarded every Greek as a potential traitor, insurrectionist, and spy. For the Turks, undoubtedly with deliberate intention, so overworked and underfed these men as to cause the death of several hundred thousand of them.” Henry Morgenthau Sr.

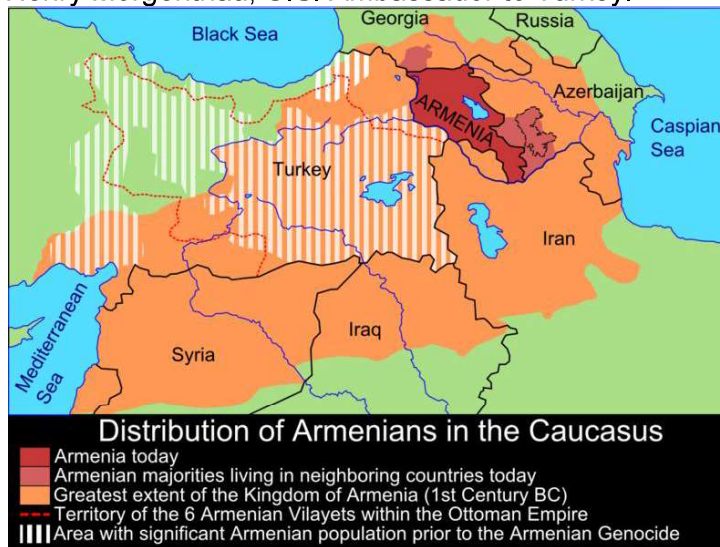
Henry Morgenthau, met Enver Pasha on a number of occasions and at one stage described him as “a savage, bloodthirsty Turk”. At the end of the war Enver fled to Germany. He was sentenced to death in absentia by Turkish Court Martial in Constantinople for his role in the genocide.



Armenian men, women, and children gunned down by Turkish forces. “Scenes like this were common all over the Armenian provinces during the spring and summer of 1915”

Turkish official teasing starving Armenian children with a piece of bread in 1915.

Henry Morgenthau, U.S. Ambassador to Turkey.



On Himmler's instructions, Reinhard Heydrich formed the *Einsatzgruppen* (task forces) to travel in the wake of the German armies at the start of World War II. On 21 September 1939, Heydrich sent out a teleprinter message on the "Jewish question in the occupied territory" to the chiefs of all *Einsatzgruppen* with instructions to round up Jewish people for placement into ghettos, called for the formation of Judenräte (Jewish councils), ordered a census, and promoted Aryanization plans for Jewish-owned businesses and farms, among other measures. The *Einsatzgruppen* units followed the army into Poland to implement the plans. Later, in the Soviet Union, they were charged with rounding up and killing Jews via firing

squad and gas vans. Historian Raul Hilberg estimates that between 1941 and 1945 the *Einsatzgruppen* and related auxiliary troops from Lithuania, and Hungary killed more than two million people, including 1.3 million Jews. The actual figure is more at two and a half million.

On 29 November 1939, Heydrich issued a cable about the "Evacuation of New Eastern Provinces", detailing the deportation of people by railway to concentration camps, and giving guidance surrounding the December 1939 census, which would be the basis on which those deportations were performed. In May 1941 Heydrich drew up regulations with Quartermaster general Eduard Wagner for the upcoming invasion of the Soviet Union, which ensured that the *Einsatzgruppen* and army would co-operate in murdering Soviet Jews.

On 31 July 1941, Hermann Göring gave written authorization to Heydrich to ensure the co-operation of administrative leaders of various government departments in the implementation of a "Final Solution to the Jewish question" in territories under German control. On 20 January 1942, Heydrich chaired a meeting, now called the Wannsee Conference, to discuss the implementation of the plan.



The villa at *Am Großen Wannsee* 56–58 in Berlin, where the Wannsee Conference was held.

The **Wannsee Conference** (German: *Wannseekonferenz*) was a meeting of senior government officials of Nazi Germany and *Schutzstaffel* (SS) leaders, held in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee on 20 January 1942. The purpose of the conference, called by the director of the Reich Main Security Office SS-*Obergruppenführer* Reinhard Heydrich, was to ensure the cooperation of administrative leaders of various government departments in the implementation of the so-called Final solution to the Jewish question (German: *Endlösung der Judenfrage*), whereby most of the Jews of German-occupied Europe would be deported to occupied Poland and murdered. Conference attendees included representatives from several government ministries, including state secretaries from the Foreign Office, the justice, interior, and state ministries, and representatives from the SS. In the course of the meeting, Heydrich outlined how European Jews would be rounded up and sent to extermination camps in the General Government (the occupied part of Poland), where they would be killed.<sup>[1]</sup>

Soon after the invasion of Poland in September 1939, the persecution of European Jews was raised to unprecedented levels, but systematic killing of men, women, and children only began in June 1941, after the onset of Operation Barbarossa against the Soviets. On 31 July 1941, Hermann Göring gave written authorization to Heydrich to prepare and submit a plan for a "total solution of the Jewish question" in territories under German control and to coordinate the participation of all involved government organisations. at Wannsee, Heydrich emphasized that once the mass deportation was complete, the SS would take complete charge of the exterminations. A secondary goal was to arrive at a definition of who was formally Jewish, and thus determine the scope of the genocide.

On 10 October 1941, Heydrich was the senior officer at a "Final Solution" meeting of the RSHA in Prague that discussed deporting 50,000 Jews from the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia to ghettos in Minsk and Riga. Given his position, Heydrich was instrumental in carrying out these plans since his Gestapo was ready to organize deportations in the West and his *Einsatzgruppen* were already conducting extensive killing operations in the East. The officers attending also discussed taking 5,000 Jews from Prague "in the next few weeks" and handing them over to the *Einsatzgruppen* commanders Arthur Nebe and Otto Rasch. Establishing ghettos in the Protectorate was also planned, resulting in the construction of Theresienstadt, where 33,000 people would eventually die. Tens of thousands more passed through the camp on their way to their deaths in the East. In 1941 Himmler named Heydrich as "responsible for implementing" the forced movement of 60,000 Jews from Germany and Czechoslovakia to the Lodz (Litzmannstadt) Ghetto in Poland.



1941 poster from Marseilles announcing the order for Jews to register

The Holocaust in France refers to the persecution, deportation, and annihilation of Jews and Roma between 1940 and 1944 in occupied France, metropolitan Vichy, and in Vichy-North Africa, during World War II. The persecution began in 1940 with the expropriation of Jewish properties, increasingly severe life restrictions, and the establishment of camps, and culminated in deportations of Jews from France to death camps in Germany and Nazi-occupied Poland from 1942 which lasted until July 1944. Of the 340,000 Jews living in metropolitan/continental France in 1940, more than 75,000 were deported to death camps, where about 72,500 were killed. French Vichy government and the French police participated in the roundup of Jews. There were an additional 400,000 Jews living in French Algeria in 1940.



Two Jewish women in occupied Paris, appear to be mother and daughter, wearing Yellow badges in June 1942, a few weeks before the mass arrests.



Pierre Laval(left) with Carl Oberg in Paris. Laval, the Prime Minister of Vichy France, helped initiate the deportation of Jewish men, women, and children to the death camps.



Kurt Lischka took over the Referat IVB (Jewish Affairs) in the Gestapo in 1938, appointed head of the Reich Centre for Emigration in Berlin, and had been instrumental in planning and supervising the deportation and murder of Jews and other "undesirables" in France. At the end of the war he was head of the Referat for the Bohemian Protectorate in the Reich Main Security Office. After the war he was sentenced to death in absentia by a French court, but lived a full, peaceful life in Germany until finally a survivor, Serge Karlsfield and his wife brought enough pressure to bear in the late 1970's that Lischka was convicted in Cologne of war crimes and sentenced to 10 years, but only served five.





Paris, 20 August 1941: Jews arrested by the French police for Interrogation. Yad Vashem Photo Archives 4520/92

Paris, 20 August 1941: Jews arrested by the French police for interrogation. Yad Vashem Photo Archives 4520/92

From May 1942 to November 1944, Carl Oberg served as Higher SS and Police Leader (*Höherer SS-und Polizeiführer*, HSSPF) "Frankreich" (France) over all German police forces in France, including the SD and the Gestapo. He was the supreme authority in France for managing anti-Jewish policy and the battle against the French Resistance. He thus drove the rounding up of Jews in the Paris Vélodrome d'Hiver (Vel' d'Hiv Roundup) in 1942. By that time he had been condemned as the "Butcher of Paris".

By 1943, however, he was resisting some of the orders issued by Himmler and Hitler. On 18 January Himmler demanded a cleansing of Marseilles with 100,000 arrests and explosive demolition of the city's crime district. Working with the French police, Oberg supervised a "minimalist" response of 6,000 arrests, 20,000 people displaced, and partial destruction of the harbour area. In 1944, Oberg blocked an attempt to establish an *Einsatzkommando* of the *Waffen-SS* in France.

Klaus Barbie, after joining the SS at the age of 22 in 1935, and serving in the Netherlands, helping to round up the 140,000 Jews in Holland in 1941, after that country was overrun by the Nazis, was sent to Dijon, France. At the age of 29 he was head of the Gestapo in Lyon where he became known as the "Butcher of Lyon". The daughter of a French Resistance leader in Lyon said her father was beaten and skinned alive, his head was immersed in a bucket of ammonia and he soon died. Barbie personally tortured adult and child prisoners. He injected acid into lungs, and kept people half immersed in freezing water. He prided himself on shooting a prisoner in the back of the head at the top of a stairs, causing the body to then do a perfect summersault down the stairs.

Historians estimated Barbie was directly responsible for the deaths of up to 14,000 people. In April 1944 he ordered to Auschwitz a group of 44 Jewish children from an orphanage at Izieu near Lyon.



In 1947, Barbie was recruited as an agent for the 66th Detachment of the [U.S. Army Counterintelligence Corps](#) (CIC). The U.S. used Barbie and other Nazi Party members to further [anti-Communist](#) efforts in Europe. The French, having sentenced him to death in absentia for war crimes, pleaded to the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany to hand him over. Instead the CIC helped him to flee to Bolivia along the "rate lines", asserting he knew too much about agent placed in various European communists organizations. Croatian Catholic clergy, including Father Krunoslav Draganovic helped in this. In 1965 he was recruited by West German intelligence. While in Bolivia, he worked for Bolivia intelligence, attaining the rank of Lt. Col. He was tracked down by Nazi hunters Serge and Beate Klarsfeld. Bolivia refused to extradite him but with a change in government he was arrested and sent to Lyon, France for trial. 730 Jews and Resistance members testified how he tortured and murdered prisoners. He was sentenced to life in prison and died in prison four years later.

On 30 January 1943 the Milice, the Vichy's most extreme manifestation of fascism, the paramilitary organization was formed by the Vichy regime (with German aid) to help fight the French Resistance. It was headed by Pierre Laval but the de facto leader was Joseph Darnand. It participated in summary executions and assassinations, helping to round

up Jews and *resistants* for deportations. They used torture for information and confessions, and were more dangerous than the Gestapo and SS because they were native Frenchmen who understood local dialects and had extensive knowledge of the towns and countryside.



The deportation of Jews from Marseilles and its environs, early morning hours of 24 January 1943; the Gare d'Arenc train station. Working together, the German and French police arrested Jews and assembled them at the train station, in preparation for their deportation. In this wave entire families were deported. No distinction was made between foreign Jews, Jews who had recently received French citizenship, and Jews who had lived in France for generations. Women taken to the police trucks were not given time to dress. Patients were ousted from their beds, elderly people were forcibly marched down the streets, and children were separated from their parents.  
Yad Vashem Photo Archives 4331/31

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Yad Vashem Photo Archives 4331/31



Deportation of Jews from Marseilles and its environs, early morning hours of 24 January 1943. French policemen leading Jews and non-Jews to the Gare d'Arenc train station in Marseilles. 1,642 of those arrested, among them 780 Jews from Marseilles, were deported to the concentration camp of Compiègne, not far from Paris.  
Yad Vashem Photo Archives 7261/380  
Courtesy Bundesarchiv



The deportation of Jews from Marseilles and its environs, early morning hours 24 January, 1943 at the Gare 'd Arenc train station. The German and the French police working together arrested the Jews and assembled them at the station for deportation to extermination camps. At the center, Edward Kriff, an Algerian-born Jewish opera singer, arrested by the French police on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January, 1943. Kriff succeeded in jumping off the deportation train and survived. The old man being helped on could be the father or grandfather of any one of us. No telling how many days they would have to stand packed together without food or water.

Rudolf Höss, the commandant of Auschwitz, and Adolf Eichmann searched for a faster way to kill. They decided to try Zyklon B.

On September 3, 1941, 600 Soviet prisoners of war and 250 Polish prisoners who were no longer able to work were forced into the basement of Block 11 at Auschwitz I, known as the "death block," and Zyklon B was released inside. All died within minutes.

Just days later, the Nazis transformed the large morgue room at Crematorium I in Auschwitz into a gas chamber and made 900 Soviet prisoners of war go inside for "disinfection." Once the prisoners were crammed inside, Zyklon B pellets were released from a hole in the ceiling. Again, all died quickly.

Zyklon B had proven to be a very effective, very efficient, and very cheap way to kill large numbers of people. It was the brand name for hydrogen cyanide. Zyklon B was an insecticide used in Germany before and during the war to disinfect ships, barracks, clothing, warehouses, factories, granaries, and more.

### The Gassing Process

With the construction of Auschwitz II (Birkenau), Auschwitz became one of the largest killing centers of the Third Reich.

As Jewish and other "undesirables" were brought into the camp via train, they underwent a Selektion (selection) on the ramp. Those deemed unfit for work were sent directly to the



gas chambers. However, the Nazis kept this a secret and told the unsuspecting victims that they had to undress for a bath.

Led to a well-camouflaged gas chamber with fake shower heads, the prisoners were trapped inside when a large door was sealed behind them. Then, an SS man, who wore a mask, opened a vent on the roof of the gas chamber and poured Zyklon B pellets down the shaft. He then closed the vent to seal the gas chamber. Often he would wait until the naked, sweating bodies crammed all together in the chamber would increase the heat and moisture in the chamber, making the gas work faster. These chambers in the years starting in later '42 were usually underground down a long ramp. After gassing the bodies would be taken up by electric lift to the ovens to be burnt up.

The Zyklon B pellets turned immediately into a deadly hydrogen cyanide gas. In a panic and gasping for air, prisoners would push, shove, and climb over each other to reach the door, banging on it, crying for mercy. But there was no way out. Within five to 20 minutes (depending on the weather), all inside were dead.

Heydrich was later appointed Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia. He started a campaign of terror with mass arrests, executions and deportations to ghettos and concentration camps to try and crush all Czech resistance. The Czech government in exile resolved to kill Heydrich in Operation Anthropoid. A major figure in the Reich and SS, he held positions, (SS)-Obergruppenführer and General der Polizei Reinhard Heydrich, head of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (Reich Main Security Office, RSHA), the combined security services of Nazi Germany, and acting Reichsprotektor of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. He was given overall charge of the "Final Solution (Holocaust) to the Jewish question" in Europe. The Czechoslovaks undertook the operation to help confer legitimacy on Edvard Beneš's government-in-exile in London, as well as for retribution against Heydrich's brutally efficient rule. The operation was carried by Czechoslovak army-in-exile soldiers in Prague, on 27 May 1942, after preparation by the British Special Operations Executive with the approval of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile. He was being driven to work from the palatial estate confiscated from a Jewish sugar magnet, where Heydrich lived with his family. Two Czech citizens who had parachuted into Czechoslovakia attacked his car at a hairpin turn on a Prague suburb road, mortally wounding him. Heydrich died of his injuries on 4 June 1942. This was the only government-sponsored targeted assassination of a senior Nazi leader during the Second World War.

In retaliation Hitler ordered 10,000 random Czech citizens to be caught and killed. However, the Nazi deputy under Heydrich for Czechoslovakia argued that this would hurt important war production in the forced labor factories turning out weapons and equipment for the Reich.

So two villages, Lidice and Ležaky, near Prague, from which Czech officers in the Czech government in London had originated were targeted. All males over the age of 16 in both villages were murdered. All the women in Ležaky were also murdered. All but four pregnant women from Lidice were sent to Ravensbruck concentration camp and the four pregnant women had forced abortions and then sent to the concentration camp. Some children were sent to be Germanized and 81 killed in gas vans at the Chelmino extermination camp. Both villages were burned with Ležaky leveled. In all over 1,300 Czechs were killed. Heydrich was slated to be transferred to France to suppress the growing French Resistance and later to be put in charge of security control of all Nazi occupied lands.

The ultimate goal of the Nazis was to eliminate all Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, Slovaks, Russians and handicapped people in the occupied lands, to establish and maintain a race of pure Aryan people.

All over Europe, wherever the Nazis took control, they looted and stole all valuables, homes, businesses, buildings, Europe's classic art works(a lot of which today are still unaccounted for), and the very lives of the people themselves.

In all the slaves and extermination camps in Germany and all the occupied lands, they indeed were temporarily the master race, but only through sheer brutal, physical force and terror.

This was the regime and system that Pop and his fellow soldiers were going to put their lives on the line to totally stop.

## Chapter Eighteen

At the start of Spring 1938, Papaw let Pop raise whatever he could on thirty good acres. Pop grew cotton, doing all his own planting, plowing, chopping, and had help in harvesting. He raised a bale an acre, an excellent yield. This was a year of getting up, working hard all day, and doing it again the next. This was an excellent yield, thirty bales on thirty acres. It enabled him to start at Texas Agriculture and Mechanical College in the fall of '38.

When he first came to Texas AMC he hadn't had a lot of the math he was expected to already have, courses most students already had taken. He hadn't had any calculus or certain trigonometry or some geometry, and had to take a test when he first got there to see if he was up to a minimum level of proficiency and knowledge, to see if he would even be accepted. He passed without any problem and was enrolled. Huntington and Manning High Schools had only offered Algebra One and Two. Nor did they offer mechanical drawing. So he really had to buckle down and learn a lot quickly.

Pop had been to A&M before during highschool when Mr. O.C. Lagrone, the Angelina County Agriculture Commissioner, took a bunch of Future Farmers of America from Angelina County there on a trip. He and Papaw had come over there before he started to get him enrolled. Papaw drove him back later when the semester was to start and Pop was left at the old Hoyle Hotel in Navasota, Texas to start. He was there to study mechanical engineering. As a freshman he was assigned a room in the Hoyle, a converted railroad hotel, along with a bunch of other freshmen and some sophomores and juniors. Navasota was twenty miles from the AMC campus.



Pop as a freshman at Texas AMC in front of the Hoyle Hotel in Navasota.

Everyone was standing around getting their room assignments in the converted hotel. A fellow freshman named Bob Galloway from the South Texas Valley walked up to Pop at sign up. "Are you an honest man?" Bob asked. Pop replied he was. So Bob asked if Pop would room with him. Pop in turn asked a tall fellow with the last name of Thurman if he was an honest man, with Thurman allowing as he was also. Pop, Thurman and Bob Galloway, who was from the South Texas Valley near Brownsville, quickly became good roommates and friends. They

roomed together the whole time they were at Texas AMC. They always referred to Thurman as "Bug" Thurman as he majored in entomology, the study of insects.

Hazing of underclassmen was de rigor there. Every student was a military cadet. Hazing included many seemingly silly rules and extreme harassment. This included being paddled at any time. Pop said the sophomores there at the Holye to oversee them were sadists and he had a blue butt that entire first year.

The sophomores were hazed in turn to be harder on the fish. The juniors would regularly give them strikes with paddles if the sophomores weren't treating the freshmen hard enough.

Mrs. Furr was in charge of the cadet's kitchen there in Navasota. She got three day old bread from the government and knew how to heat it so that it smelled and tasted just as fresh made bread. In years to come her family started the Furr's restaurant chain all over Texas.

They all got up with the dawn to get dressed, get hazed by the upperclassmen, and load up on Army trucks to drive the twenty miles to the Texas A&M campus in College Station. The town College Station was named so because of the train stopping there to pick up and let off young men since the college started there in 1889.

One of the things Pop had to get use to was the restroom facilities. His whole life he had gone to an outhouse. Even all the schools he had gone to only had outhouses. When needing to use the commode in the converted hotel there in Navasota he would wait until everyone was out and stand up on the commode, squatting down as he had done in an outhouse. After a few weeks he finally got comfortable enough to use it like everyone else.

Room and board was fifteen dollars a month, but many boys couldn't afford that so they worked in addition to taking full classes, and Pop was one of those. Galloway would bring back a large box of oranges, grapefruit and other produce from home in the Valley and the school would credit that against part of his tuition.

Pop got a job on campus at a laboratory helping an engineering professor with his research. Mr. Smith and Pop would test various materials for their insulation properties, wood, brick, Tile and others. They would place heat sensors in various places, measuring how much heat would pass through in a certain period of time. They took these and after several verifications would enter the readings into records from which they were building a reference book to be used by builders and industries.

Pop also sold cokes at football games for ten cents each. He got maybe a penny per drink sold. Often instead of going home for a visit he had to work a home game in order to earn money. During the school day, during the week, any time Pop wasn't in a class he was working in the lab for the professor. There were always measurements to record, tests to set up, with measurements to be taken and tabulated. His school work had to be done at night after getting back to Navasota. It was hard days of work and study. He liked his mechanical engineering studies and worked hard at them, usually making A's in those courses.

There wasn't much or any of a social life then at Texas A&MC. All the students were young men, with a few daughters of professors amidst the thousands of uniformed male students. Besides, most of the students had to have jobs and were busy with them and their studies. A&M had its own dairy and farms with students working at various times throughout each day. They were used for agriculture class instruction and training but also to supply the student population with food.

Pop and all his group rode to the main campus early each morning in large, canvas covered bob tailed trucks. Hard metal benches in the truck beds were where they sat.

They'd get up early, eat at seven, get on the buses and get to campus in time for classes starting at eight. The trucks left campus around five in the evening to come back.

His first year at AMC was tough. Severe hazing from upper classmen, homesickness, going to class, working on campus, then catching the trucks back to Navasota right about dark in time for supper which Mrs. Furr had ready, then it was studying until lights out at eleven p.m. Joe Galloway remembered something that always reminded them of lights out. The lone train whistle sounded in the distance as it passed through Navasota every night at eleven.

Pop's first year he followed the mechanical engineering curriculum exactly. Chemistry, mechanical drawing, math, engineering problems, and military science that all students were required to take, since A&M was a full Reserve Officer Training Corp military school. Pop never had a date the entire time he was student at A&M. There was no time, no money, and no girls.



Pop at Texas AMC studying hard, working with a slide rule for calculations.

J. George H. Thompson taught engineering problems to freshmen. He was firm but a great teacher

Pop said, one of Pop's favorite professors. He'd spend as much time with a student as was needed. He'd even invite students over to his house for Koolade. They called him alphabet Thompson because of his initials. In time when Texas AMC became Texas A&M University a building was named for the good professor.

One of his specialties was kinematics – motion. He was also an expert on textile machinery with such machinery involving many types of motion.

The summer after his freshman year found Pop back at Shawnee Prairie working on the farm, plowing, chopping cotton, working with mules, planting, and when the cotton harvest started coming in working at Flournoy's cotton gin there on the Prairie, directly across from the Shawnee Prairie Baptist Church. It was hot, hard, dusty work wrestling around the heavy metal suction pipe that powerfully pulled the cotton from the wagons lined up waiting to give up their white harvest, walking in the raw cotton, his feet sinking with each step. He weighed around one hundred and thirty five pounds that summer. His Mother's wonderful cooking, his childhood friends to camp out, fish, ride horses with when a few spare moments were grasped were most welcomed, but work never stopped. All Pop's earnings went to Papaw who used it for the family and to help out with the children's college expenses.

Back at Texas A&MC as a sophomore Pop had Squareroot Jackson for a differential equations and calculus class. He was called Squareroot because the rep was that he would take the square root of the number of guys in his class and fail them. Some students even called him Squareroot to his face, but he didn't mind. He liked his reputation. However, Pop

said he was a good teacher and if you needed help he would do so. Pop did so well at the end of the semester he was exempt from the final.

At the beginning of his sophomore year Pop and his classmates were moved to the main campus in some barracks type buildings on the south edge of the campus. They were the replacement battalion for the rest of the Corps.



Pop as a sophomore at Texas AMC

Joe, Pop's younger brother, enrolled as a freshman and Pop got him to room with him and his other two roommates. When other sophomores would try to haze Joe, Pop would tell them to leave him alone, Joe had to study.

At first Joe tried to take engineering like Pop, but I remember Uncle Joe telling of a professor who tried to explain to him some engineering concept with the math and all and Joe said, "I just didn't get it." Soon he decided to try Animal Science. He found he loved it and got grades as good or better as Pop.

There was a Corps trip to New Orleans in early December 1939. This meant that every cadet was ordered to attend with Pop and the most of the Aggies making the trip catching rides along the side of the road as they thumbed their way down to New Orleans.

Texas A&MC was playing Tulane University for the national football championship. The year before in 1938, TCU at Ft. Worth had gone undefeated for the season and had beaten Carnegie Mellon University for the National Championship in the Sugar Bowl on January 2, 1939. They were lead by their quarterback Davey O'Brien and their coach Dutch Meyer. O'Brien went on to win the Heisman Trophy. He was five foot-seven inches and weighed one hundred and fifty one pounds. In 1937 TCU was lead by "Slinging" Sammy Baugh, who went on to play pro football.

Texas A&MC's star player that year was John Kimbrough. He and his brother Jack had come out of west Texas. Big raw boned, tough kids raised in the midst of the Great Depression. They were tough as nails and as rough. They had played six man football in West Texas. A&MC recruited Jack. Jack insisted John come along if he was to play for A&MC, with John becoming the best player the college had in years, an All American.

Tulane was tough and wanted the title badly. They started the game getting the better of A&MC. At halftime the A&MC's coach Horner Norton tried scaring the players, "Boys, if we don't play better, with the financial situation A&MC is in, we could lose Kyle Field!" Kyle Field of course being the football stadium on the A&MC campus.

John Kimbrough carried the ball many times during the game and he and the team gave it their maximum effort in the second half. Football then was played with little padding in the uniforms for protection and no face guards on their helmet. Kimbrough was tough to bring down and would often drag four or five opposing players extra yards on each play as they tried tackling him. The game was a defensive slug fest and Kimbrough dragged some of the other team's players across for A&MC's second touchdown. A&MC was ahead 14 to 7! Toward the end of the game Tulane answered that touchdown and only needed to kick the extra point to tie the game. Just as Tulane's kicker met the ball, Texas A&MC's player little Herbie Smith hopped up on the back of a big Aggie linebacker(it was legal then), named Roy Bucek from Schulenburg, Texas; and jumping up with all his might, stretching his arms to their fullest extent, blocked the kick! Texas A&M College were National Champions!

After the game Pop and a bunch of Aggies wound up staying in the lobby of the Ambassador Hotel, as none of them could afford a room. Dad said the floor, all the chairs and couches were filled with sleeping Aggies. The hotel didn't mind and let them alone. When it was all over the Aggies hitch hiked back by various routes to College Station.



## Chapter Nineteen

While Pop and his fellow classmates had been getting ready for their fall semester at Texas AMC, that September 1, 1939 saw the sovereign country of Poland viciously attacked by Germany from the west with 1.5 million well equipped soldiers and supported by a vastly superior German Air Force, and by the Soviet Union from the east. This was the result of the Beria-Ribbentrop Pact signed just a week before between these two brutal dictatorships. This action in Poland was known as the Defensive War. Two days later France and England declared war on Germany.

The pact secretly divided Poland between Germany and the Soviet Union. Seventeen days after Hitler's invasion of Poland in 1939, Stalin invaded the eastern part of Poland on 17 September following the Molotov-Togo agreement that terminated Soviet and Japanese hostilities on 16 September.

Though Germany used its new blitzkrieg tactics, the Poles put up more resistance than expected, but were finally overwhelmed. Polish cavalry units never directly charged German tank units as Nazi propaganda touted, except once as noted further on.

They would approach and dismount and fight as infantry. On the evening of September 1, 1939, in the Battle of Krojanty, they did charge and disperse a German infantry battalion along the Prussian Eastern Railway near the town of Choinice and the Pomeranian village of Krojanty, until German armored cars appeared from a nearby forest and forced the Poles to retreat. The Poles were equipped with anti-tank guns and rifles. The cavalry was in the process of transitioning to armored units when the Nazis attacked, starting the Defensive War.

Despite being outnumbered and lacking in comparable heavy armor to the Panzer I and II or airpower that could match the shrieking Stukas, Poland fought hard and the cavalry fought well.

There were 16 confirmed cavalry charges by the Polish Army in 1939 and most of them were successful. The reputation of the German army as a well-oiled machine had yet to form fully – co-operation between armored and infantry units was poor, the men were still untested, and Blitzkrieg was largely a theory, applied inconsistently and with varying degrees of success.

Against the backdrop of chaos and inexperience, Polish cavalry wreaked havoc as W Jackiewicz recalled. "The Germans dispersed before us, tried to set up their machine guns, loose shots were fired and strangest of all, there was total panic among the Germans. In this first phase I hardly had any losses."

The crude rewriting of the Charge at Krojanty may have forced its way into military history, but so too has the jaw-dropping heroism of the Battle of Mokra.

While the Wołyńska Cavalry Brigade dismounted and dug in against a formidable onslaught destroying some 50 armored vehicles without giving an inch of ground – testament to their high morale, excellent training and flexible use of anti-tank weapons – a cavalry detachment accompanying the TSK tankettes of the 21st Armored Division found themselves hurtling toward German panzers, sabers held high.

This – the only time that Polish cavalry, it could be argued, charged into German tanks – was entirely an accident.

Lost in the clouds of smoke, Captain Jerzy Hollak's horses found themselves in the middle of a German tank column in the confusion. Amazingly, they punched straight through

the startled Germans and seized the high ground, forcing the Panzers to withdraw. Hollak's unlikely victory, however, was fleeting.

Three days later, on 3 September 1939, the cluster of beleaguered hamlets fell. Mokra was lost, but it remained a potent symbol of the heroism, sacrifice – and most importantly – the surprising effectiveness of Polish cavalry doctrine.

Generalfeldmarschall Gerd von Rundstedt of Army Group South wrote in his report:

“The Polish cavalry attacked heroically; in general the bravery and heroism of the Polish Army merits great respect. But the higher command was not equal to the demands of the situation”



A Polish Uhlan with a wz. 35 anti-tank rifle, pictured in 1938 in a Polish training manual

Other Polish defensive action was greatly hindered by the onslaught of the German Luftwaffe air force and the speed of the German armor units encircling vast areas of Poland.

By 17 September, the Polish defense was already broken and the only hope was to retreat and reorganize along the Romanian Bridgehead. However, these plans were rendered obsolete nearly overnight, when the over 800,000-strong Soviet Red Army entered and created the Belarusian and Ukrainian fronts after invading the eastern regions of Poland in violation of the Riga Peace Treaty, the Soviet-Polish Non-Aggression Pact, and other international treaties, both bilateral and multilateral. Soviet diplomacy had lied that they were "protecting" the Ukrainian and Belarusian minorities of eastern Poland since the Polish government had abandoned the country and the Polish state ceased to exist. After a Polish victory at the Battle of Szack, the Soviets executed all the Polish officers and NCOs they had captured. The Polish Army held out hope that France and Britain would help supply their defense, and maybe help by attacking western Germany, but there was little done. From the first days Warsaw had been bombed. The Luftwaffe on 24 September bombed Warsaw with 1,150 aircraft.

A picture of a beautiful, blond, young, Polish girl leaning over her sister who had just been killed in a Nazi aerial attack told it all. The look of utter horror, sorrow, and bewilderment on her face was not to be forgotten. This is the true face of war.

Where both armies had penetrated to, the true colors of both dictatorships showed themselves. Within months in the area of Soviet control, mass deportations of Polish men, women, children, and the elderly were driven out of their homelands and sent to various concentration camps in Russia's north-east, Siberia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan.

It was thought by the Soviets the deportees' sense of "Polishness" was perceived as a threat to Communism. "They were taken to Siberia in cattle cars where they were left homeless and without any means to survive. They were given no chance other than to work.

If they did not work they did not eat.” Genewofa Sobolewski, now living in Peterborough, United Kingdom, related, “It was slave labor in very hard conditions. Many worked as lumberjacks in very cold temperatures.” Her parents died early on. Genewofa later worked in a coalhouse, “It was so hard living there, people would be dropping like flies but you never stopped to help because you might be next.”

After the war she made it to England and met her husband Henryk, also a survivor of the camps. Five of his sisters and brothers died in the camps. Hundreds of thousands of Polish civilians died there. During the fifty years of Soviet occupation era after the war, no one in Poland was allowed to speak openly of the slave labor camps in Siberia. Only in the 1990s did the truth finally come out after the break-up of the Soviet Union.

The Soviets had captured and separated out a large number of Polish military officers. They brought them to the Katyn Forest there in eastern Poland, and from April through May, 1940, the Soviet secret police, the NKVD, executed them. The action was based on Lavrentiy Beria’s, (head of the NKVD) proposal, dated 5 March 1940 to execute all members of the Polish Officer Corps. It was approved and signed by the Soviet Politburo, including its leader, Stalin. About 8,000 executed were Polish officers taken prisoner during the Soviet invasion of Poland. The rest were Polish doctors, professors, lawmakers, police officers, and other Polish leaders. Poland’s conscription system required every un-exempted university graduate to become a reserve officer. The NKVD was able to round up and eliminate much of the Polish intelligentsia, thus eliminating any imagined future threat to Soviet communism. The figure often given for the Katyn Forest murders by the Soviets is around 14,000, but the total reserve officers executed is historically cited as being 21,768.

When the Germans later launched Operation Barbarossa, the attack on the Soviet Union, they found the mass grave of the Polish officers and tried making a propaganda coop from it, but with so much blood and death already on their hands nothing came from it.

The world saw the first broad usage of the military technique called *blitzkrieg* in the Nazi attack on Poland. The Germans combined concentrated rapid armor and air attacks to overwhelm the valiant Polish defenders. The Polish Army had 700 outdated tanks, the Germans had 2,400 of the most advanced tanks in the world. At the time there was almost no defense against the German Mark III tanks on the battlefield. The country of Poland was overrun in four weeks.

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From “Born Survivors”, author Wendy Holden related how Priska Rona lived an idyllic childhood in Zlate Moravce in what is now the southwestern corner of the Slovak Republic, south of Poland. Her hard working parents raised five children and ran a successful kosher restaurant in the small picturesque town with an imposing church, schools, and streets lined with smart looking shops. They had a large staff of devoted female employees with a room of eight musicians that played for the customers.

She had one memory of pressing her nose to the glass of a patisserie on her way to school before treating herself to a sugar-dusted confection of a cinnamon babka with streusel topping. The breaking apart of those flaky pastries as crumbs cascaded down her blouse summed up her childhood. It served as a tool to help her through some of the most ravenous pangs she would experience for years on end in times to come.

Priska had a gift for languages and became passionate about education. They had a large apartment with separate bedrooms for each child and a large garden sloping down to a stream running the length of the garden where she help many classmates with learning languages, especially English. "It didn't matter to me if they were Jews or Gentiles. I was friends with everyone the same. There was no difference." The family wasn't devoutly religious but their father made sure they attended the synagogue on each holiday. There was very little anti-Semitism in their community.

She attended the local high school, Janka Krala and won numerous academic awards. She tutored other students in English after class in their beautiful garden.

After graduation she took up teaching and seemed set for a career as a professor of languages. She spoke English, French, Hungarian and German.

Jews in the new Nazi "client states" became outcasts overnight. People Priska had known all her life would no longer speak to her on the street or would turn their heads when she passed.

A professor who use to take her dancing and out to dine stopped calling altogether. Signs appeared, "No Jews Allowed", or "No dogs or Jews allowed". Incrementally increasing cruel restrictions were imposed on them at every turn.

In 1940 her parents were banned from running the café they had carefully built up over sixteen years. An Aryan trustee was put in charge of it. "They lost everything. They were good people." Said Priska. They moved to Bratislava where Priska was able to work privately as a teacher and met the man who would be her husband, Tibor Lowenbein, a Jewish journalist.

When the Nuremberg Laws were passed Tibor was fired from his job at a newspaper. He found work at a bank and wrote to Priska every day. They were married on June 21, 1941. On June 22 Germany invaded the Soviet Union.

In September 1941 all Jews in Slovakia were faced with a list of three hundred new rules to abide by, in what the Germans called the Jewish Code, or *Zidovsky Kodex*. Reinstating practices of Jews to wear humiliating emblems that had been instituted in places as far afield as England and Baghdad since the ninth century.

As related on page 70, suppression of Jews had started during the Roman Empire when they took over the land of Judea after the Jewish people went through the Exodus from Egypt. Roman emperors converted to Christianity and with the doctrine that the Jews didn't accept Jesus as the Messiah had started taking away their rights.

With the emergence of Islam numerous battles were fought by Europeans to keep the Muslims from taking over several countries on the periphery of Europe, including Spain and in Eastern Europe. In the Middle East since its emergence Islam violently attacked both Jews and Christians when they didn't convert to Islam. Turkey was permanently overtaken by force by Muslim armies.

This brutal oppression occurred in Russia also during the Czar's rule with the infamous pogroms.

Everywhere Jews lived under Nazi domination, many non-Jewish citizens would freely attack Jewish people, men and women on the streets, often injuring them severely. The pictures of these attacks are horrible in viewing.

Everyone had to have passports and other documents stamped with a large “J” for the German word Jude. They had to buy armbands or stars to wear on the front and back of their clothes.

Then the authorities forced all Jews to catalogue all silver, art, and their valuables to be delivered to the local banks. Furs and their finest winter clothing followed. Then all pets, cats, dogs, birds were taken to collection centers, never to be seen again.

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Gerda Weissman as she said in her book, “All But My Life” had never seen Bielitz, Poland, her beautiful home town nestled at the base of a mountain, part of the Szndzielnia mountain range, so frightened. It was a gay, sparkling little town, a textile center for the fine fabrics it produced, seemingly sheltered from intruders by the high peaks, so charming it was known as “Little Vienna.” Almost all the inhabitants were bilingual in both Polish and German. In carefully tended gardens in the center of town was an excellent theater and the castle of the Sulkowskys nobility, closely linked to the Imperial Hapsburgs.

On a Friday morning, September 1, 1939, the Germans attacked their area of Poland from Cieszyn on the border at the Czechoslovakian frontier. Her family huddled in their house, no one able to sleep or able to touch their food. Horses with wagons loaded with refugees started heading east on the roads through town.

Her father had recently had a heart attack and been confined to bed. He had served in the medical corps of the Austrian Army in World War I and remembered the pale faces and bodies of the wounded and the dead.

“Papa appeared strange, almost lifeless...the mountain tops resounded with a thunderous blast that made the glass in the windows rattle...I looked at Mama...Her large, dark eyes seemed bottomless against her pale skin...” On the corner of the street several mothers were clutching their infants to their breasts and an old peasant woman crossed herself.

There had been talk for many weeks of possible war, but Gerda’s father’s health was the priority for them now. They had received a few days before a cable from her Mother’s brother Leo, now in Turkey, warning them Poland’s last hour has come. That it was dangerous for Jews to remain. He had visas at the Warsaw embassy for all of them, urging them to come. But they decided not to disturb her father to put him through such travel in the condition he was in.

Gerda’s family spent a sleepless night of September 3 in damp basement of their home while the shells and bombs fell around their beautiful town. That morning there were increasing cries of “Heil Hitler!” coming from the town’s people and cyclists in grey-green uniforms roaring down the streets. Gerda’s nineteen year old brother went outside to let their cat, Schmutzi in, coming back with a bullet hole in his trousers. There is shooting from the roofs, the Germans were coming!

In a week when the German soldiers came into Bielitz, the neighbors across the street had put up a swastika flag and were serving the soldiers cake and wine and shouting Heil Hitler! The Polish Army couldn’t hold out against the modern military might of the German military machine coupled with its blitzkrieg tactics. In only 18 days the nation of Poland was subdued.

The Soviet Union attacked from the east on September 18 and refugees hoping to find some refuge in eastern Poland found themselves caught between two murderous regimes. In four weeks the country of Poland was totally overrun.

Systematically the Germans started controlling life in Poland. Afraid to go out, stories of people going out to never return abounded. A timid knock on the door revealed Aunt Anna and her daughter as she embraced Gerda's father. Two days before she, her husband and their two children had attempted to reach Warsaw by train while bullets and bombs flew all around. Her husband was blown up by one such bomb while they were stopped at a station. She and her two children walked east until they met a line of German troops and guns. The men were separated from the women and every tenth one was shot. Then the men were all marched into the forest. Aunt Anna ran toward them in an effort to save her son, but erupting machine gun fire signaled killings.

Aunt Anna and her daughter through dangerous passages arrived in Bielitz and went to her home, but found a German family living there. The houses of friends and relatives they went by were empty. The next morning there was a timid knock on the Weissman's door. Anna's son miraculously appeared! Hungry and haggard but alive. As the group of men were being marched into the woods to be gunned down, they and the Germans herding them ran into a small group of Polish soldiers who had been hiding in the woods. In the shooting and confusion David managed to escape and make his way here.

Gerda visited her Father's factory with a business associate of the fur plant, Mr. Pipersberg. He sent her home. Upon entering the factory he was brutally beaten. The Germans were carrying off all the plant's large inventory produced by their hard work in huge trucks.

Gerda's brother Arthur and David were caught up in the Nazi administration with a notice in the mail that all men between the ages of sixteen and fifty were ordered to register. A few days later Arthur left as ordered. Word came later that Arthur and a group of boys had been locked in cattle cars for eight days, taken to the *Gouvernement*, that part of Poland not officially part of the German Reich, turned them loose in the forest where SS troops shot and beat them with some escaping to get the word back of what happened. Gerda's mother began to mutter over and over, "Arthur, Arthur where are you?"

Then late in November, in the mail a printed card ordered all Jews to report on December 2, 1939 to Hermann Goering Strasse there in Bielitz with instructions to place all valuables, keys tagged to tell what lock they opened in the house, and all money on a table in front of the house. Each person could bring twenty pounds of clothing. Violators of this order would be killed.

An official stopped by later to say they could sell some of their belongings. Non-Jewish towns people crowded in to take beautiful glass, china, and silver ware and family heirlooms, years spent in accumulation for next to nothing in payment. Their house was being torn apart for a few dirty bills and coins in return.

Then word came the transport order was delayed. Hope for an Allied reprieve to push back the Nazis and for Poland to resume its people's civilization was still clung to. Word came that Arthur was in the Russian Zone of occupation. He was alive!

In June 1940 Gerda's family were severely disheartened to learn of the fall of France, Belgium, Luxemborg and the Netherlands to the Nazis.

Gerda's family managed to struggle through to the next June 1941 by her and her mother working day and night at knitting clothes for others. They did this mainly in exchange for food, keeping them alive. Then with great fanfare and pronouncements of victory, they could make out Joseph Goebbels' exhortations. Germany was attacking the Soviet Union! Arthur was in the Soviet zone. In days to come German victory after victory was announced.

A sign appeared one day at their beautiful garden, Only Germans Allowed. To enjoy any nature they were confined to taking walks through the cemetery.

Jews were increasingly forbidden to do many things that made life livable and joyful. Learning English was one of them. While coming home in July from a secretive English lesson that a professor's daughter had offered to give her, Gerda stopped to gaze through the fence at the city municipal pool surrounded by exquisite lawns and flower beds, listening to the gay music of a small orchestra. She and her family had spent many happy hours there. Now it was forbidden them. Feeling hot and sweaty in the July heat as she watched the children splashing in the pool, she carried some potatoes in a sack for her family, wearing the yellow star on her front that said, "Jew", her English book hidden at the bottom.

Suddenly a heavy hand fell on her shoulder and a policeman roughly asked what she was doing there. He grabbed her bag and turned it over spilling the potatoes and her book. He told her, "Learning English will be the last pleasure of your life!" She followed him as he took the book. She was paralyzed with fear, knowing such little as this had condemned others to summary execution. She was also struck with fear for her parents being caught up in this crime in the eyes of the Germans, and right now in the terrible worry they would have for her not coming home.

At the police station the officer with pride described his discovery of her crime to the official behind a large, wide desk. The official barked, "Do you realize what you have done?" Too scared to speak Gerda simply nodded.

"This is a terrible crime...to learn English while we are at war with England. The punishment will be meted out accordingly." Frozen with fear, Gerda wanted to plea and say many things but a lump in her throat prevented her from speaking.

The other policeman was dismissed to go on his duties. As soon as he left the official softened his tone a little, "Now run home as fast as you can." He extorted her. She still couldn't speak, so she quickly curtsied as a way of saying thanks and took off, running home as fast as she could; overjoyed to see her parents, not telling them what happened but telling them she was fed up with English lessons and would start over again after the war. In the following years, that official and one other, in all the hundreds of Germans Gerda encountered, were the only two that ever showed any humanity toward her.

Ilse Kleinzahler was Gerda's closest friend. She kept Gerda informed about the latest information as she lived near the Jewish Center, a building the Germans allowed some of the Jewish boys to lodge at.

Ilse was a great pianist. Later that year, when winter had set in, she was forced to turn over her beautiful piano to a policeman who had seen it in her house. She and Gerda walked to Ilse's home for an hour in the cold snowy wind, as they were forbidden from riding the bus.

Ilse played her piano one last time for Gerda, with her fingers running expertly through waltzes, stormy polonaises, dance melodies, and the many moods the darkening evening reflected as Gerda listened. Three and a half years later, in darkness, in a cold, wet meadow, beautiful, joyful Ilse would die in Gerda's arms. She had just turned eighteen.



Gerda received a letter from Erika, a classmate who's family fled Bielitz right before the Germans came. They were in a small town near the *Gouvernement* land near the former Polish-Russian border. Her letter told of hearing screams from the street outside the house they now lived in. She and her father rushed to the basement while her mother went to get Erika's baby brother. Erika and her father heard screaming above and all through the town. They huddled in the basement for hours, learning later that most of the Jews in town were caught by the grey uniformed police, including apparently her Mother and baby brother. Men, women, and children, were taken to the town square, made to undress, to lie face down in lines where the murders trampled them on horses. Those still left alive were marched into the woods, made to dig their own graves and shot. She never heard from Erika again.

Gerda and her family were forced to leave their ancestral home, and all the Jews left in Bielitz were forced to move into some dilapidated buildings near the train yards on the edge of town, where news of deportations of people to slave camps or death camps were a daily occurrence.

On Himmler's instructions, Heydrich formed the *Einsatzgruppen* (task forces) to travel in the wake of the German armies at the start of World War II. On 21 September 1939, Heydrich sent out a teleprinter message on the "Jewish question in the occupied territory" to the chiefs of all *Einsatzgruppen* with instructions to round up Jewish people for placement into ghettos, called for the formation of Judenräte (Jewish councils), ordered a census, and promoted Aryanization plans for Jewish-owned businesses and farms, among other measures.<sup>[c]</sup> The *Einsatzgruppen* units followed the army into Poland to implement the plans. Later, in the Soviet Union, they were charged with rounding up and killing Jews via firing squad and gas vans.<sup>[104]</sup> Historian Raul Hilberg estimates that between 1941 and 1945 the *Einsatzgruppen* and related auxiliary troops killed more than two and a half million people, including 1.3 million Jews.

On 29 November 1939, Heydrich issued a cable about the "Evacuation of New Eastern Provinces", detailing the deportation of people by railway to concentration camps, and giving guidance surrounding the December 1939 census, which would be the basis on which those deportations were performed.

## Chapter Twenty

### The Winter War

Seeing the easy conquest they and the Nazis had with Poland, Stalin first demanded Finland cede large areas of Finland to the Soviet Union. The Finns refused and Stalin attacked on 30 November 1939 with 450,000 men in 21 divisions, thinking that with the Polish experience the Soviet Union would have an easy time with their massive army of men, tanks, and artillery against the small force of Finland.

However, the Finns used lightning surprise raids on ponderous Soviet formations, especially at night when the Soviets were encamped, the extreme cold of the Arctic to deadly effect, and fought with great tenacity inflicting many casualties. Finnish sniper Simo Hayha alone killed 505 Soviet soldiers during the 105 day war. His count was much higher if those he killed while also manning a machine gun at times were added. Nicknamed "The White Death", on December 1, 1939 he killed 25 Soviets. He was shot in the head toward the end of the conflict, ending up in a coma. He came out of it to become a national hero. He lived until April 2002.

The Finns had mobile kitchen units on sleds so their soldiers on the front lines could have hot meals and even saunas so their men to boost the morale of their men and maintain their national culture. The Soviet army had much more stationary, ponderous field units for meals, which the Finns would also attack, making hot meals sporadic out in the fields, and no saunas. The Finns also nimbly attacked Soviet tanks with Molotov cocktails, so called because Soviet foreign minister, with Stalin's directive, pushed this attack on Finland.

At the start of this war against Finland, the Soviets had over a one hundred times more tanks in the attack to the Finns mostly obsolete 50 tanks. However, the Finns would ski rapidly up on the Soviet tanks, dropping Molotov cocktails into the Soviet tank air vents. The soldiers inside the tanks would then scramble out, making the action much more equal for the Finnish soldiers to deal with them. Because of the cold and thick snow cover, it was hard for Soviet soldiers to provide support to the tanks, which became targets for the fast moving Finns.

Besides the vast, thick, snowy forests, the temperature plummeted to as much as minus forty five degrees Fahrenheit. Though vastly outnumbered ten to one, it was grueling months of lightning attacks and ambushes on the Soviet Army until 13 March, 1940 before the Soviets finally subdued the Finnish Military through the sheer crush of numbers, armour and air attacks.

The Soviet Air Force dominated the skies throughout the war, bombing Helsinki on the first day of the war and later almost leveling a major Soviet objective near the Karelian Isthmus front, the Finland city of Vyborg with 12,000 bombs dropped on the city.

During the Soviet era, the government gave estimates of around 43,500 Soviet soldiers dying in the Winter War attack on Finland. More modern, accurate estimates of Soviet casualties were 126,875 dead and 188,671 wounded. This was given by a Soviet researcher named Grigoriy Krivosheyev in 1997.

Nikita Khrushchev, himself a major political commissar for the Soviet Union during the war and future leader of the country said later, "In our war against the Finns, we could choose the location of the war and the date of its start. In number we were superior to the enemy, we had enough time to get ready for the operation. But on these most favorable terms we could only win through huge difficulties and incredibly great losses. In fact this victory was a moral defeat. Our people certainly never got knowledge of it because we never told them the truth."

In 1994 the President of Russia, Boris Yeltsin, denounced the Winter War, agreeing it was a war of aggression.

While the Finns had 25,904 dead and 43,557 wounded in a 2005 estimate that was revised upward to those figures. Immediately after the war Helsinki had announced 19,576 dead.

Stalin forced the country of Finland to give them eleven percent of the total area of Finland, compromising thirty percent of their economy, especially important nickel and mining deposits.

The city of Vyborg was ceded to the Soviets. Stalin's army began forcing hundreds of thousands of Finns to move from their historic homelands.

A Ukrainian veteran of the Raate Road battle, involving the Soviet 44<sup>th</sup> Division against the Finns, Sergeant Pyotr Andrevich Morozov, interviewed in 1991 by the Finnish non-fiction writer Leo Karttimo, said the Finns returned Soviet prisoners of war. Tragically none of these returned prisoners made it back to their homes as the Soviet secret service NKVD executed them all in the summer of 1940.

This was the only major conflict occurring in the European theater at the time. The Soviet's poor performance against the small Finnish military convinced Hitler that an attack on the Soviet Union would be successful.

In May 1941 Reinhard Heydrich drew up regulations with Quartermaster general Eduard Wagner for the upcoming invasion of the Soviet Union, which ensured that the *Einsatzgruppen* and army would co-operate in murdering Soviet Jews. But it is to be noted also that the regular German army widely participated in the murder of Jews and Slavs and in the capture of citizens in Poland and on the Eastern front for use in slave labor for the Reich.

The failings of the Soviet Military were in the process of being corrected when Operation Barbarossa, the German attack on the Soviet Union, hit.

## The Phoney War

During the time of the Winter War, the Soviet Union was supplying Germany with large amounts of oil and metals. Britain and France had even looked at plans to attack the Soviet Union in an effort to stop this. The Soviets even helped Germany get around the British naval blockade by importing materials and sending them on to Germany.

There had never been such intensive trade between Germany and the Soviet Union as that which took place during the eighteen months of 1940 to June 1941. Soviet imports of chrome, manganese and platinum, for which Germany relied entirely on imports, made up 70% of Germany's total imports of those materials. While the Soviet Union provided 100% of German imports of rye, barley and oats, this was 20% of the amount of the total German

harvest. Three quarters of Soviet oil and grain exports, two thirds of Soviet cotton exports and over 90% of Soviet wood exports were to the Reich alone. Germany supplied the Soviet Union with 31% of its imports, which was on par with United States imports into the Soviet Union. Germany supplied 46% of Soviet machine tool imports, and was its largest such supplier.

Particularly important were grain, manganese and chrome—vital ingredients of the German war economy that now faced the British naval blockade. In terms of imports and exports, the total balanced out at 500 million reichsmarks in either direction, but the strategic gain to Hitler was far greater than that to Stalin.

Stalin referred to this extensive supplying of Nazi Germany with goods, petroleum, and strategic materials as feeding the Nazi beast to placate it.



A potato supply train arrives in Berlin in January 1940.



A freight train in occupied Poland.

This period from the attack on Poland on September 1, 1939 until 10 May 1940 when Germany attacked France and the low countries, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg, quickly become known as the Phoney War in Britain as it was called by the British newspapers. There was a brief attack on Germany by France in the Saar region that quickly fizzled out. It was also called “The Sitting War” as the large British and French forces facing the western border of Germany largely sat in place without moving.

90% of the Germany's front line fighters and bombers during this time were tied up in the attack on Poland. German military commander Alfred Jodl later said, “If we did not collapse already in the year 1939 that was due only to the fact that during the Polish campaign, the approximately 110 French and British divisions in the West were held completely inactive against 23 German divisions.” German General Siegfried Westphal stated that if the French had attacked in force in September 1939, the German army “could only have held out for one or two weeks.” This was probably one of the great little reported tragedies of World War II in what could have been prevented had the British and French attacked at that time. The Fall of France, Belgium and the Netherlands, the Scandinavian countries, the attack on the Soviet Union, even the Holocaust could have all been prevented or the horror to so many millions greatly reduced. Britain and France had already declared war on Germany, could have occupied at least the western half. They had armies poised ready to attack and didn't.

## Chapter Twenty One

In July 1940 Germany eyed Belgium and France. The maniacal mind of Germany's leader, having already eaten up Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland and the country of Austria with threats but without firing a shot, placated by the European powers lead by England's Lord George in a desperate bid to maintain peace; continued voracious in its greed for more lands and people, for more and more power, bringing along Germany and its people in a continuing dance of conquest and death. Just previously Poland had been invaded and divided up by Germany and the Soviet Union.

German general Mainstein and his staff studied other military leader's plans of the past and their own army's greatly improved capabilities. The French and English armies were poised to strike into Belgium against the impending German invasion. The French army and political leaders found comfort in the well built and stationary Maginot line fortifications. Part of the reason for the line was the tremendous loss of manpower in the previous war and the resulting low French birth rate in the years afterward, and the French effort to form a formidable barrier against any future German aggression.

The Allied armies were positioned to the north toward the English Channel, filling in the space between the Maginot Line and the sea. The French policy was patterned along the military actions of the last war, basing its tactics largely on static warfare.

The Germans planned coordinated usages of land and air forces in rapid movements. They planned to attack at the end of the Maginot Line in the Ardennes with a spearhead of ten divisions of armored panzers, where the Allies were weakest and had felt the area was almost impassable and thus needed little defending. The Germans planned to come in behind the Maginot line and the French and British armies, cutting them off. The subsequent days would prove which methodology worked best. The fate of nations, millions of people and the world itself hung in the balance. Hitler was taking a tremendous risk with most of his generals objecting to the tactic, as the Allies had more men and equipment, though not the most updated. Regardless, had they moved decisively and with coordinated conviction against the German flanks, isolating or slowing up significantly a large part of the invading force, the war would have been over before it began and enveloped the world.

But the principles of Blitzkrieg, lightning war, surprised and overwhelmed the French as the Germans stormed toward the Bay of the Somme, cutting off the Allies, resulting in the retreat of the British back to Dunkirk, and the six weeks conquering of France. German General Erwin Rommel was a key tactical panzer commander in the conquest of France as was the meticulous General Paulus, who later commanded the German Sixth Army at Stalingrad, was also an effective commander in taking France as he had been in the attack on Poland.

The Dunkirk evacuation of May 27 – June 4 1940, codename Operation Dynamo, was in reality a backdoor victory for the England and the Allies, with 340,000 Allied soldiers making their way back to England's shores to continue the fight. Goering convinced Hitler that the Luftwaffe could stop the evacuation. The German army still attacked in an effort to size the port before the evacuation could take place, but its full force was held back as the

commanders felt overall it was exhausted and overextended, and the French army with some British units fought an effective rear guard action until the bulk of the soldiers were taken off by every ship, boat, and skiff coming over from Great Britain. Some 40,000 French and another 40,000 estimated British Soldiers were left behind to endure five years of executions, extreme deprivation, forced marches and slave labor. Units of the French Army continued bravely fighting. French Premier Reynaud favored evacuation of the army to North Africa to fight on. The French cabinet appeasement faction considered a deal with Hitler, resulting in Vichy France. The French army was soon overwhelmed by the Wehrmacht.

Forty percent of the soldiers evacuated were French. Most of the tanks, heavy weapons and equipment of the British Army had to be left there on the continent, leaving the British with few heavy weapons to try any offensive actions for some time to come. For some time after the Dunkirk evacuation, the British Army could field twenty five divisions, armed mostly with rifles. This, plus hastily formed volunteer units of 1.5 million men, was all they had to stand up to the might of the German wehrmacht and its many heavily armed and experienced divisions. The next step for the Nazis was to neutralize the British Royal Air Force in order to make way for a full invasion of the British Isles. Then it would be on to attacking the last major Allied nation, America, across the sea.

The Nazi conquest of France meant the conquerors controlled all the seaports, enabling German Admiral Carl Donitz to set up U-Boat pens on the French coast and cutting the time for his U-Boats to cruise to attack Allied shipping in the Atlantic by two weeks.

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The city of Warsaw, capital of Poland, flanks both banks of the Vistula River. A city of 1.3 million inhabitants, Warsaw was the capital of the resurrected Polish state in 1919. Before World War II, the city was a major center of Jewish life and culture in Poland. Warsaw's prewar Jewish population of more than 350,000 constituted about 30 percent of the city's total population. The Warsaw Jewish community was the largest in both Poland and Europe, and was the second largest in the world, second only to New York City. There were three and a half million Jews in Poland at the time.

Following the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, Warsaw suffered heavy air attacks and artillery bombardment. German troops entered Warsaw on September 29, shortly after its surrender.

Warsaw surrendered on September 28, 1939.

Less than a week later, German officials ordered the establishment of a Jewish council (Judenrat) under the leadership of a Jewish engineer named Adam Czerniaków. As chairman of the Jewish council, Czerniaków had to administer the soon-to-be established ghetto and to implement German orders. On November 23, 1939, German civilian occupation authorities required Warsaw's Jews to identify themselves by wearing white armbands with a blue Star of David. The German authorities closed Jewish schools, confiscated Jewish-owned property, and conscripted Jewish men into forced labor and dissolved prewar Jewish organizations.

#### Warsaw Ghetto

On October 12, 1940, the Germans decreed the establishment of a ghetto in Warsaw. The decree required all Jewish residents of Warsaw to move into a designated area, which German authorities sealed off from the rest of the city in November 1940. The ghetto was enclosed by a wall that was over 10 feet high, topped with barbed wire, and closely guarded to prevent movement between the ghetto and the rest of Warsaw. The population of the ghetto, increased by Jews compelled to move in from nearby towns, was estimated to be

over 400,000 Jews. German authorities forced ghetto residents to live in an area of 1.3 square miles, with an average of 7.2 persons per room.



### Hunger in the ghetto

Children eating in a Warsaw ghetto street. Warsaw, Poland, between 1940 and 1943.

The Jewish council offices were located on Grzybowska Street in the southern part of the ghetto. Jewish organizations inside the ghetto tried to meet the needs of the ghetto residents as they struggled to survive. Among the welfare organizations active in the ghetto were the Jewish Mutual Aid Society, the Federation of Associations in Poland for the Care of Orphans, and the Organization for Rehabilitation through Training. Financed until late 1941 primarily by the New York-based American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, these organizations attempted to keep alive a population that suffered severely from starvation, exposure, and infectious disease.

“The hunger in the ghetto was so great, was so bad, that people were laying on the streets and dying, little children went around begging...”

—Abraham Lewent

Food allotments rationed to the ghetto by the German civilian authorities were not sufficient to sustain life.



## Chapter Twenty Two

The European war in 1939 had already come to America in some important ways. Every war effort had deadly risk. One early on was that of the merchant seamen that plied U-Boat inhabited waters to supply desperate Allies already at the front of the war.

One in every fifteen merchant seaman lost his life in carrying the crucial supplies to every theater during the war. The early years of the war the death percentage was much higher. Uncle Bubba Lowry from Lufkin said on taking supplies to the Soviet port of Archangel and Murmansk, "That North Sea would get really cold." Not to mention German subs smashing a torpedo into your slow moving, heavily laden ship without warning.

One of the merchantmen, Herchles Esibill said of crossing the Atlantic, "I heard thunder...ships on either side of us were hit. One was a tanker. I could see people run out of midships, maddened by the heat, running into the flames." He said, "Just the sight of a U-Boat, even one of our own, would terrify me."

After a voyage or two many merchant seamen would quit and join the Army as it was considered safer duty.

The war for America was fought first on the sea in the European theater. President Roosevelt fought through a recalcitrant U.S. Congress the Lend Lease Program. It was really misnamed, in that it created a stream of massive supplies, equipment and money from America to England and soon to the Soviet Union and other Allies. It was called Lend Lease but it was really a Giveaway Program that no one really would be expected to pay back. The United States sent many million tons of goods, food, war supplies, ships, tanks, artillery pieces, trucks, weapons, and monetary funds to various Allies fighting the Axis powers comprising Germany, Japan, and Italy.

For the European Theater the Atlantic Ocean was the initial battleground to just keep England from being starved and bombed out. By the end of 1939, within a short space of four months, German U-boats, mines, airplanes, and surface raiders had sent more than 215 merchant ships – 748,000 tons of shipping to the bottom, along with two of Britain's largest war ships : the British aircraft carrier *Courageous* and the battleship *Royal Oak*.

It has often been said that Britain fought Germany alone during this time. This is not entirely true. They fought with massive American material support. Their aerial Battle of Britain was one of an individual nation's great courage. This was the battle in the air to oppose Germany's gaining control of the air over Britain so the Nazis could invade in Operation Sea Lion.

After the invasion of France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, at midnight on June 7, 1940, the French auxiliary bomber *Jules Verne* approached Berlin, acting as though it was going to land at Tempelhof Airport, only to fly over it and bomb the Siemens-Werke factory. They had been amazed on approaching Berlin to see it fully illuminated instead of blacked out. The crew with Naval commander Captain Henri Dalliére and pilot Henri Yonnet dropped eight 551 pound bombs from the bomb bay, and all of a case of incendiary bombs by hand out the passenger windows as they had no way of dropping the incendiaries from the plane. The

explosions brought the Berlin air defenses to life. The bomber made it out. The German Propaganda Ministry the next day said it had been an air raid drill.

The 4.30pm British war cabinet meeting on 27 May consisted of Churchill, Lord Halifax, Neville Chamberlain, Clement Attlee, Arthur Greenwood, Sir Alexander Cadogan, Sir Archibald Sinclair and Sir Edward Bridges. There was just one topic to discuss: the suggested approach to Mussolini in negotiating with Hitler on Britain's behalf. Britain's army was in great peril at the port of Dunkirk, France, and estimates at the time said only 10% of the soldiers would be evacuated. Lord Halifax and Neville Chamberlain pushed very strongly for talks with Hitler through Italy. Churchill through that meeting and the next few days maneuvered and reasoned his way to no deal with Herr Hitler, as he put it. While seriously considering their arguments of negotiation and given the perilous state of their nation's situation, his goal of no negotiation and to keep fighting no matter what finally occurred. The evacuation of Dunkirk happened from May 27, 1940 to June 4 and was successful in saving the majority of the British Army and many French soldiers, who comprised 40% of the 350,000 men evacuated. With this the Nazis began their aerial attack on Britain, attempting to neutralize the British Royal Air Force in order to then proceed with the land invasion of the British Islands.



Left: German machine gunner sits at his battle position in the nose of a German Heinkel He 111 while en route to England on November of 1940. Right: Supermarine Spitfire Mark I of No. 610 Squadron RAF flying in formation 24 July 1940



Airmen and Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) Operators at work in the receiver hut of the radar station at Ventnor, on the Isle of Wight, during the Battle of Britain.



This camera gun film shows tracer ammunition from an RAF Supermarine Spitfire, flown by Flight Lieutenant J H G McArthur hitting a German Heinkel He 111. These aircraft were part of a large formation which attacked the Bristol Aeroplane Company's work at Filton, Bristol, just before noon on 25 September 1940.



Pilots of the Royal Air Force scramble to their Aircraft in order to intercept German bomber formations during the Battle of Britain, England-Summer 1940

Over a period of 267 days, the Blitz continued, with London attacked 71 times and bombed by the Luftwaffe for **57** consecutive nights. Up to 2 million houses were destroyed or damaged, 60% of those in London, and more than 40,000 civilians were killed.

On the evening of December 29, 1940, London suffers its most devastating air raid when Germans firebomb the city. Hundreds of fires caused by the exploding bombs engulfed areas of London, but firefighters showed a valiant indifference to the bombs falling around them and saved much of the city from destruction. The next day, a newspaper photo of St. Paul's Cathedral standing undamaged amid the smoke and flames seemed to symbolize the capital's unconquerable spirit during the Battle of Britain.

Number of British airmen: 2,353  
 Number of non-British RAF pilots: 574  
 Number of RAF airmen killed: 544  
 Number of British aircraft shot down: 1,547  
 Number of German aircraft shot down: 1,887  
 Average age of British pilots: 22  
 Number of Battle of Britain pilots killed later in the war: 791  
 Average life expectancy of a Spitfire pilot: 4 weeks  
 Number of British fighters built in 1940: 4,283  
 Length of the Battle in days: 114

From research by the London Times in 2010.

The aerial Battle of Britain was one of an individual nation's great courage. This was the battle in the air to oppose Germany's gaining control of the air over Britain so the Nazis could invade in Operation Sea Lion. The main battle for control of Britain's air space occurred between 10 July 1940 and 31 October 1940. Crucially during the battle Germany concentrated on Britain's airfields and RAF infrastructure. Once, when Churchill was visiting RAF fighter command, constituting a hive of anxious activity, he asked about the RAF reserves to call upon in continuing the defense of Britain. "There are none." He was told.



The private library at Holland House, the residence of Lord Lichester had built the house in 1605. The House had been the scene of many literary activities during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.



Three children are pictured as they sit amid the rubble of what had been their home, after an overnight bombardment destroyed it on 27 September, 1940 in East London during the Blitz.



Woman having tea amid the rubble during the London Blitz



Winston Churchill inspecting bomb damage in Battersea, South London, 10 September 1940.

The head of the German Luftwaffe, Herman Goring, said Berlin would never be bombed. Hitler had placed London off limits for bombing. However, on the night of August 24, a lost German Heinkel bomber dropped some bombs on London by accident on its way home. British Prime Minister Churchill ordered an immediate attack on Berlin. The next day a force of 81 Vickers, Wellingtons and Handley Page Hampdens headed for Berlin. Only half reached the Reich capital as it was obscured by dense clouds. Little damage was done, but one of the elephants in the Berlin zoo was killed as the zoo was near important government buildings near the city center. In 1944 during another bombing raid on Berlin seven elephants were killed, leaving only an elephant named Siam to last out the war.

An incensed Hitler ordered Goring to focus on reprisal raids on English cities, especially London, instead of concentrating on neutralizing the RAF. This was a grave tactical mistake by the Germans, giving the RAF a much needed respite from the constant destruction of their ability to field aircraft and crews to fight the German aerial onslaught.

On September 7, 1940, the British radar stations, instead of reporting the German bombers coming across the Channel and heading to different RAF airfields and aircraft production and repair centers, reported the bombers were staying in formation and looked to be heading directly to London.

The German air crews said the British fighters always seemed up in the air ready to meet them. This was due to the chain of radar stations built in a circle around southern England that enable the British air crews to take off and be up at altitude ready to attack the German bombers and fighters. The radar installations were called Chain Home, and were the best in the world at the time. Göring didn't think much of the British radar installations and so didn't aggressively attack them.

It is estimated that before the start of the bombing of London and British cities, there was only one week left of effective fighting forces in the RAF. Had Germany won the Battle of Britain, no doubt Germany would have invaded Britain. They had been in active preparations for it all along the coast of France in Operation Sea Lion. The RAF was estimated to have shot down 1,100 German planes during this time line and the Germans 650 British planes. Other estimates give 1,800 German planes shot down and 1,000 British planes. The London Times more accurate figures are already shown. During the battle Winston Churchill said of the RAF pilots, "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."

The German raids were conducted mostly at night, but the "Blitz", as it was called by British newspapers, failed to break the British people and in latter September Hitler cancelled his plans to invade. The Blitz continued with intensity until May 10, 1941, until Germany started massive preparations for the invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. 43,000 British civilians were estimated to have been killed during the Blitz. The bombing of British cities by both German bombers and V-1 and V-2 weapons continued into 1945. A million homes were destroyed. A total of at least 55,000 people were killed by bombing on England during the war.

These figures were to be vastly eclipsed by Germans, workers, military personnel, and civilians, killed and wounded in the massed, continuing Allied bombing raids soon to come all over Germany. The Marshal of the Royal Air Force, Sir Arthur Harris, 1<sup>st</sup> Baronet, in 1942 gave a quote of what was to come. He soon garnered the nickname "Bomber Harris".

"The Nazis entered this war under the rather childish delusion that they were going to bomb everyone else, and nobody was going to bomb them. At Rotterdam, London, Warsaw, and half a hundred other places, they put their rather naive theory into operation. They sowed the wind, and now they are going to reap the whirlwind."

He went on to say in a radio address on July 28, 1942, "We are going to scourge the Third Reich from end to end. We are bombing Germany city by city and ever more terribly in order to make it impossible for her to go on with the war. That is our object; we shall pursue it relentlessly." The German people couldn't have really understood what they were about to bring on themselves. Neither did the Japanese people.





A young boy sitting outside where his house used to be. Photographer Toni Frissell regarding this picture: *"I was told he had come back from playing and found his house a shambles—his mother, father and brother dead under the rubble...he was looking up at the sky, his face an expression of both confusion and defiance. The defiance made him look like a young Winston Churchill."* This photograph was used by IBM to publicize a show in London. He did indeed survive the war. He grew up to become a truck driver after the war, and walking past the IBM offices, he recognized his picture" The damage was most likely caused by a vengeance weapon as this occurred toward the end of the war. During the course of the bombing more than 55,000 civilians were killed during the war.

In 1940 President Roosevelt had secretly negotiated the trade of 50 overage destroyers to Great Britain in exchange for leases on six naval and air bases in the West Indies.

Hitler had given orders that no U-Boat attacks were to be made against American warships during 1941, but October 21, '41 saw German sub commander Topps' U552 sink the first American warship Ruben James near Greenland. Then with the Pear Harbor attack and war declared by Germany and Italy against the U.S. full war on the sea began.

In just two nights in 1940 five U-Boats sank 20 Allied merchant ships. By the end of 1940 over one thousand Allied ships had been sunk with dozens of crewmen lost with each ship. The German U-Boat "Happy Time" as they called it, 58 Allied ships were sunk in May '41 alone, continued until the end of 1943. One, U 48 during the course of the war sunk 50 Allied ships. It managed to survive the war. The Second "Happy Time" occurred from January 1942 into August when U-Boats attacked lightly defended merchant and U.S. Naval ships along the U.S. East coast, sinking 609 ships and 3.1 million tons with only 22 U-Boats lost.

In 1943 over 1,000 Allied ships were sunk, then the application of American and British scientific statistical methodology, long range aircraft, the production of small, heavily armed U.S. Naval Corvettes and the breaking of the German Navel Ultra code enabled the Allied defenses to start making serious deadly inroads into curtailing the German success against Allied shipping. Out of 1,156 German U Boats, the Allies sunk 700 during the course of the war. In May 1943 41 U-Boats were sunk in what the Germans called Black May. The German U-Boats commander, Admiral Carl Donitz, lost his son Peter on one of those subs. But the German U-Boats remained a deadly threat until the very end of the war. Of the 39,000 German submariners serving on U-Boats, only 9,000 lived to the end of the war.

Convoys were also crucial to supply the Soviet Union when Germany attacked them on June 22, 1941. One convoy, PQ17, sailed from Nvalfjord, Iceland to Arkhangelsk in the Soviet Artic with 35 ships, enough to fully supply 50,000 Soviet soldiers. The British Admiral Dudley Pound, acting on information German surface units, including the battleship Turpitz were moving to attack the convoy, ordered the escorting Allied battleships away from the convoy and told the convoy to scatter. The Germans raid never materialized and the undefended merchant ships were attacked by Luftwaffe planes and U-Boats. 24 were sunk.

## Chapter Twenty Three

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As related in Wendy Holden's book "Born Survivors", Anka Kauder was beautiful and fluent in German, French, and English with a smattering of Spanish, Italian, and Russian and reveling in the rich Life of Prague Czechoslovakia, one of Europe's most vibrant, multi-cultural cities. Her father owned with his wife Ida's relative a successful, large tannery and leather factory in Trebechovice pod Orebem. Their spacious apartment had a garden and patio with a gazebo with an outdoor oven for summer dining. They grew vegetables and fruit in the garden. Her mother worked behind the till at the factory and had several staff at home to help with the house and garden. "My mother would have done anything for me," Anka said. "We had a beautiful relationship. Only the best was just good enough for us at home." Her older brother Tonda took her everywhere with him as a best friend.

At eleven years of age she left her idyllic childhood home to become one of the few Jews to attend the Girls Lyceum in Hradec Kralove. She did very well at the Gymnasium, going to parties, dancing, having boyfriends, learning to play the piano, to dance, participating in tennis and rowing. "I was happy as a lark. We happened to be Jewish and that was that. It didn't hinder me in any respect."

Her German speaking Mother heard Adolf Hitler's inflammatory speeches on the radio and became overwhelmed with fear, insisting to everyone that no good would come of him.

Anka felt too far away from Nazi ideology. "We never thought anything would happen to us. We felt invincible."

She had moved to Prague in 1936, remaining largely immune to concerns about Hitler. She was on holiday skiing with friends in the Austrian Tyrol with friends in March 1938 when the Anschluss-Night of the Broken Glass happened.



Overnight Austria was in the hands of the Nazis and Czechoslovakia was surrounded. Red flags bearing swastikas appeared on the streets of Salzburg. Anka watched in amazement as Austrians greeted Hitler as a hero while the country's Jews became outcasts.

Anka's first serious boyfriend, Leo Wildman, announced he was going to England to join the British Army. He had acquired a special permit to leave the country. His father had just been released from prison for subversive activities but reached the train too late to see his son off.

Anka's sister Ruzena's husband, Tom Mautner, got a permit to leave, pleading with Ruzena to take their son Peter and go with him to England, but her sister refused to leave the rest of her family, a move she would later greatly regret.

In March 1939 German tanks rolled into Prague. Anka looked out onto the streets to find steely eyed Nazis marching through Wenceslas Square on a grey day and people stabbing the air with salutes. Adolf Hitler proclaimed the partitioning of Czechoslovakia into the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Incrementally restrictions became increasingly severe on all Jewish people in the nation. The Nuremberg Laws began, stripping them of the fundamental human rights and loss of freedoms. Their family car was taken. Her father's factory was taken over by the Reich and her parents were thrown out of their apartment. Their family assets were frozen. Their citizenship taken away and they were only allowed in segregated areas of restaurants and hotels.

Jews were banned from public baths, swimming pools, the cinema, and pushed to the back of the second car on the city's crowded trams. They were prevented from owning bicycles, cars, or radios. Anka was banned from the University. "It got worse and worse but you get used to everything in life, so you got used to that as well. There was a possibility of getting out, but unless you knew what was waiting for you...it seemed difficult to leave everything behind for the unknown." A film came she desperately wanted to see. She went without telling anyone, and sat right in the middle of the seats. Half way through the film was stopped, the house lights came on and the Gestapo burst in to check everyone's papers. Anka sat frozen in terror to her seat, terrified of what would happen when they saw the "J" stamped on her identity papers. They stopped one row right in front of her, apparently bored and left. Her friends later admonished her, "They could have shot you!"

Others sought ways to leave, except now Anka had fallen in love with a handsome German Jew from Berlin, a very successful architect who had fled to Prague, thinking it was far enough away to be safe. Bernd Nathan was able to flout the restrictions and pretend to be Aryan. His father Louis had won Germany's highest military award – the Iron Cross (First Class) in the First World War.

"It was love at first sight." Anka said. They were married 15, May 1940, the day Holland surrendered to the Nazis. Twelve days later the Allies had to evacuate their troops at Dunkirk. On May 28 Belgium surrendered. On 10 June Norway followed suit and Italy declared war on Britain and France. Almost a month later resettlement transports of Jews began.

SS-Obersturmbannführer Adolf Eichmann set himself up in a requisitioned Jewish house in Prague to oversee the Central Office of Jewish Emigration. He demanded multiple transports to the Dachau concentration camp by 1940 and if the community elders didn't comply, he would have his troops clear Prague of three hundred Jews a day.

Their world was changing beyond all recognition. They heard through friends it was possible by train to cross Siberia to Shanghai where the occupying Japanese had

unexpectedly welcomed 23,000 Jews to a ghetto sanctuary, but Germany invaded the Soviet Union and that was closed.

A program to save Jewish children managed to rescue 10,000 Jewish and other children from across Europe. Now Anka and Bernd were required to wear the yellow Star of David. Anka wore it proudly in her best clothes. Bernd lost his employment. They lived on Anka's small allowance and what little she made in making hats.

In September 1941 SS Obergruppenfuhrer Reinhard Heydrich, the area Gestapo head, was named acting Reichsprotektor of Bohemia and Moravia. In less than a month 5,000 men, women and children were rounded up and sent to the Lodz ghetto. In the same month over 33,000 Jews had been lined up and shot by the Nazis in Kiev.

"...We started preparing ourselves for something we couldn't define...We didn't know they were sending people to their death on a conveyor belt."

In November 1941 Bernd received notice to report to the Messepalast in the district of Holesovice, taking him away from his wife and their happiness. The 1,000 men so ordered were told they were "pioneers" to build a model ghetto in the Czech garrison town of Terezin, renamed by the Germans Theresienstadt. Horrified by this Anka at least thought that it is still in Czechoslovakia and not "East", which they all dreaded, but not sure why they did.

On a frosty morning in December Anka herself was part of a Jewish progression heading to a dilapidated six storey building once housing trade fairs. Each floor was crammed with hundreds of men, women, and children all vying for space on the dirty floor. Limited, stinking lavatories and only a little food and water, served in mess tins was available. After three sleepless days and nights they were mustered into columns and marched the thirty minutes to the railway station. The townspeople watched them go, many turning away, their cheeks wet with tears. The way was lined with young Nazi officers. All had restrictions on the baggage they could bring. Besides her basic clothes, Anka brought a hat box filled with three dozen of her husband's favorite sugar covered donuts. Her girlfriend Mitzka, pleaded with a baby faced soldier barely out of his teens to help her. "I could give a shit if that box comes or not." He spat out.

Arriving at the station after a trip crammed together with 1,000 other passengers, they arrived after marching through snow flanked by a cordon of Czech and SS guards at the Terezin ghetto. Men were separated from wives, children sent to separate quarters, all in dusty, unheated buildings infested with vermin, placed in three-tier bunks, twenty to a room, given musty straw mattresses. There was no place to store anything and clothing washed with polluted water from a pump was hung all over, never to really dry.

Everyone over fourteen was assigned work by the Jewish elders, often seventy hours per week. Anka came down with scarlet fever and was put in quarantine for six weeks. Then she recovered and had a job distributing food, allocated by ration cards people were assigned. "From the bottom please?" the hungriest would plead.

In the coming months at its height another thousand people were brought in every third day. Sixty thousand of the old, young, sick, and hungry filled the overcrowded garrisons, making impossible demands on the kitchens and ancient sewage systems. They were in a pitiful state and many died within days of arriving. The stink of rotting human waste pervaded everything in the dismal greyness of the place. Hunger became a constant torture. The food allocated was never enough. Once proud people from beautiful homes and prosperous lives were forced into unwanted intimacy with vermin-infested strangers. They

had only in common Jewish blood and no choice but to breathe in air thick with the smell of unwashed bodies, fear, and hunger reducing them all to a bitter existence.

Amidst this hell the conductor Karl Ancerl organized music events and became the leader of the Terezin String Orchestra. Everyone worked to survive and help others where they could, especially family members who arrived later, remaining stoical grateful it wasn't worse, able to grow vegetables in the agricultural division. A small hospital was started. Money sent from family outside was stolen by the Germans and fake ration cards given to the recipient instead that could still be used on the black market.

"We were in good spirits until the executions started," Anka said. Nine young men were publicly hanged for "insulting German honor." Seven more young men were executed for such as theft of sweets and possessing cigarettes. There were six such punishments in rapid succession. More restrictions on movement within the ghetto were instituted while an avalanche of people from Germany and Austria continued to arrive. Lights out to save electricity was imposed with candles in short supply. Fleas and bedbugs were constant worry and rations of coal were only issued if the temperature dropped below zero.

Epidemics of encephalitis, diphtheria and dysentery wiped out hundreds who lost control of their bowels and died lying in their own waste. "People started to die like flies because of malnutrition, bad housing, lack of washing facilities. ...It was fatal for old people." Animal instincts took over to get enough food to stay alive. Those working in the kitchens hid potatoes or peelings, selling or bartering with them. "If anyone tells you they didn't steal, don't believe them," Anka said. Masons started building a crematorium to dispose of the bodies.

Though many died there was never enough room, especially with those arriving from Germany and Austria. In January 1942 the transports East began, each made up of between one and five thousand souls. The transports became a kind of terrorism, a threat overshadowing everything else. Of the 140,000 Jews sent to Terezin, 33,000 were estimated to die there, and 88,000 sent to the death camps, fifteen thousand of whom were children. 1,260 had been promised safe passage to Switzerland with volunteers to escort them, almost all were executed at Auschwitz.

The Gestapo sold imaginary plots of land and apartments with a room "with a view" to privileged German Jews to move to Terezin, who arrived well dressed, expecting a country resort to sit out the war only to be shocked at what they were now cast into.

In this worsening state, inmates created a rich artistic life. The walls of the Terezin ghetto was filled with some of Europe's finest artists, intellectuals, composers, and performers who devised plays, recitals, and encouraged others to express themselves through art and poetry. When the Germans didn't object they threw themselves into brightening this dark place through expressions of their many talents.

Paul Friedman wrote: "I never saw another butterfly... Butterflies don't live here. In the ghetto." He was twenty three when sent to his death in Auschwitz. Artists who secretly made drawings depicting the worst conditions of the ghetto, when found, were tortured, their fingers broken, with many shot or sent to concentration camps.

Still, plays were put on with architects, set designers, and seamstresses making the sets and costumes, and writers encouraged to pen plays and cabarets. "It helped to ease the atmosphere... Through arts you could let go." Choirs were started, though members would frequently change due to them being sent away on the transports east.

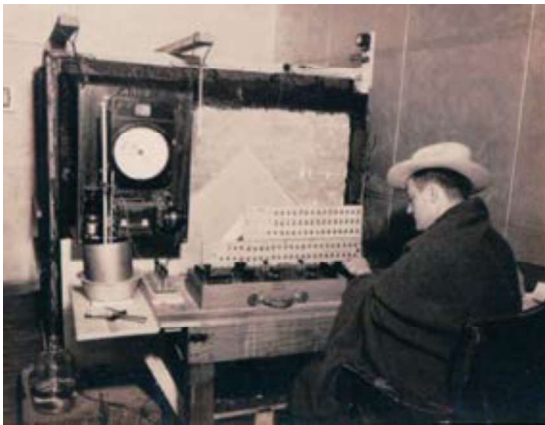
Operas were performed featuring famous soloists from across Europe. A top Czech producer and set designer of the era, Frantisek Aelinka put together an opera for children. He died in Auschwitz at age forty-two. After the war it was produced in many places in the world.

Anka and Bernd had lost a child before being sent to the ghetto. They would meet secretly as would other couples, and amid all the chaos she found herself pregnant again in 1943, but a typhoid epidemic in the ghetto was killing hundreds a day. How to bring a baby into this world when anyone could be sent "East" at any time?

Like other ghettos set up by the Nazis across Germany and Eastern Europe this one was also a temporary holding center for Jewish families until they could be sent to be disposed of in the now industrially efficient death camps or sent to be worked to death in forced labor camps.

## Chapter Twenty Four

The summer of 1940, between his sophomore and junior years, Pop stayed on campus to work with Mr. Smith on his thermo research. He stayed with Mr. Smith and his family, eating his meals with them. Mr. Smith had a daughter that was sweet on Pop. When he ate lunch or supper with them she tried sitting near him, but he wasn't sweet on her. He spent the whole summer working and homesick. At the end of the summer Mr. Smith submitted his dissertation with all the findings he and Pop had determined through all their research, and was awarded his PhD.



Pop working at the then Mr. Smith's lab on campus, taking temperature readings for determining insulation properties of materials. It was cold on purpose inside the lab, thus Pop is bundled up.

His junior year was more of study and work at games and going home infrequently. Yes, Pop hazed poor freshmen and sophomores also. There were a few rich students, but they were treated the same as anyone else, with no student being exempt from the many, often strenuous tasks the upperclassmen gave the lower classmen in building character. All were treated the same. Sometimes a rich kid would be asked to do very trivial chores, such as "Go down to the drill field, count the stars on the flag and come back and report." When they got back they'd make them do something else as mundane. But Pop said one could tell the rich kids whenever the Corps traveled, because their bags and civilian clothes were much better than the rest of the guys.

All students got demerits for any minor infraction, including not knowing some campus or Corps fact. Something not exactly right on one's uniform, or not obeying an order exactly as

given. If anyone got more than forty demerits they had to work them off on the Bull Ring. That's what they called the track around the football field in Kyle Field. For every hour they walked they got one demerit cancelled. Those who made it through all the years of Corp tasks and trials formed a camaraderie other students in other colleges just didn't have, except maybe for West Point and Annapolis. For all his time there, the most demerits Pop ever accumulated was exactly forty, never having to walk the Bull Ring.



Pop on right and Freddy Valentino next to him doing grunt work at Texas AMC. The student on the left is unknown.

One weekend Pop was invited to come home to Ft. Worth with a fellow junior classmate named McLaren. McLaren was an only child and that Sunday McLaren, Pop, and McLaren's father went to church while McLaren's mother stayed at home to cook them all a good, Sunday lunch. Right in the middle of the meal Mrs. McLaren had prepared, Pop's knife slipped as he was trying to cut his steak and little green peas flew all over the white table cloth she had everything spread on. Pop, embarrassed, could only blurt out as a way of explanation, "Gosh, that steak sure is tough!" He said the dinner was quiet for a while after that.



Pop and his sister Maxie Rene. She came down from Texas Women's College to attend the Junior Dance with Dad at Texas AMC. As noted, there were very few women at Texas AMC. Maxi Rene would become a nurse in the Nurse Corps.

Hardly anyone had a personal auto. They hitchhiked. Pop would walk out to Highway 30 going east to Huntsville and wait on the side of the road and thumb until someone stopped to pick him up. Aggies always wore their uniforms and someone would generally pick them up. Hopefully they would be going all the way to Huntsville instead of stopping at one of the tiny towns along the way like Roans Prairie, Shiro, and Bedias, which was a little off the road. From Huntsville it was seventeen miles on across the Trinity River to the town of Trinity. From there it was a lonely road with very little traffic to little Groveton, Texas.

Pop was let off in Groveton one night in the winter, and couldn't get a ride the thirty three miles further to Lufkin through the Neches River bottom on Hwy 94. He saw a truck at a construction site on a new jail at the side of the courthouse at Groveton. It wasn't locked and he spent a freezing night in the cab, trying his best to cover up with his Army greatcoat. One of the truck's windows wouldn't roll up. The bitter cold flowing right in on him. If it hadn't been for his greatcoat he felt he would have froze for sure. At dawn the next morning he caught a ride with a milk truck all the way into Lufkin. That was Saturday morning. He got home to the Prairie that afternoon and had to start back to school at A&M early that next afternoon.

Catching a ride was often hard. Sometimes he could only catch a ride to Madisonville, and then have to go south to Huntsville, then on to Trinity, Texas and Lufkin and finally down to Shawnee Prairie. Sometimes he couldn't get to Huntsville and would thumb a ride to Houston, taking a chance on getting stuck there, spending precious money on a taxi to get over to Hwy 59 to hitch the 140 miles north to Lufkin and then on to Huntington and the Prairie. These were the days of very little traffic on many roads. A lot of people couldn't afford cars or gas to put in them. People just didn't travel that much. There were no interstates. The state highways were narrow two lane roads and there just weren't all that many people.

Once when hitching to Houston he was left off in Coldspring, Texas. It was a small town but a county seat. He was let off right at the jail. There was just no traffic and he waited most of the night to get a ride on to Houston.

Where there was a car or truck on the road people would generally pick up a young man in uniform. They trusted and felt safe with the Aggies.

One time he caught a ride into Huntsville with one of the foremen of the guards at the Walls Unit of the Texas State Prison in Huntsville. He invited Pop in and they ate with the prisoners right there in the prison.

When he got into Lufkin late in the evening he would sometimes stay with a Lufkinite a year behind him at Texas AMC named Charles Slover. Sometimes they would hitchhike together. Pop would then call Papaw to come pick him up the next day to finally get home. He saw, amid the kids there a certain girl, but she was much younger than him and he didn't give her much thought.

One night a year or so later in Lufkin he went to the movie show. There was a line of people getting tickets. He came up to the window. Instantly recognizing the girl at the ticket window, he saw the sister of Charles Slover had turned into a young, enchanting beauty.

Mom was working at the window, so he started talking to her to ask her out after she got off work, but she gently interrupted him, making him wait to the side until she finished selling all the tickets for the movie.

She then left her booth and walked out with him. They walked over to Landon's ice cream parlor there in down town Lufkin and each had a double dip ice cream. They started talking, and as he said, "I fell hook, line, and sinker."



## Chapter Twenty Five

Between his junior and senior years in the summer of 1941, Pop and all the juniors attended Army summer camp for six weeks training at Ft. Bullis, just north of Ft. Sam Houston on the edge of San Antonio. There they did maneuvers, fired weapons, built bridges over rivers, pontoon and Bailey bridges, camped out in the summer heat with plentiful insects. Pictures from that summer show them hauling a lot of the artillery pieces and equipment with horses and mules.

Much of the political landscape and public opinion in the U.S. was firmly isolationist. Wendell Wilkie lost the 1940 presidential election to the incumbent Roosevelt twenty two million votes to twenty seven million. Wilkie was a staunch isolationist. Many still thought this was Europe's war, though by the summer of 1938 the Japanese had already conquered most of the major cities of China, having started the military conquest of Manchuria in 1931.

Though China had been convulsed by regional conflicts throughout its history, this was different. This was a major disruption of the structure of the Chinese culture and daily life. Everywhere the Japanese reach extended, people were killed and injured or left without food and shelter. Ahead of their army, the Japanese air force would often strike towns and villages, even in the most remote mountains, bombing and strafing again and again, unarmed civilians, their homes, and the buildings making up their communities.

## Chapter Twenty Six

When Pop became a senior in the fall of 1941, he got his senior boots, a seminal badge of achievement. He paid a hundred dollars for them, a lot of money then. All seniors looked resplendent in their uniforms and boots.



Pop in his senior boots on the front steps of the Texas AMC administration building.

One weekend he wore them home. He had caught rides all the way to Lufkin, past Huntington and finally caught a ride which let him off at the cutoff. That was the road that made a right angle with the Lufkin-Beaumont highway and went the four miles to Shawnee Prairie and further on to the Manning area. Pop couldn't get a ride home from the cutoff so he started walking. Part of this road was oiled after his freshman year making it a lot more travelable, but all the rest were dirt. The heavy leather senior boots went all the way up to his knees and were uncomfortable walking the long distance in. He came to the dirt-mud road to home, reaching a wooden bridge about a mile from his house. There were some gaps on the board ends of the bridge, and he managed to catch his boots in the cracks there and work them off. He walked the rest of the way home barefoot with the muddy road feeling good and soft beneath his feet.

As a senior Pop was a cadet Major in charge of the replacement battalion in the barracks he and his group had moved in years earlier from the Hoyle Hotel in Navasota. He was on the student Welfare Committee as the representative of the replacement battalion. This student committee oversaw and advised on the welfare of all students.

For the three years he was in the replacement battalion all the students there served as kitchen help, including Pop. Mrs. Furr and her help had come over from Navasota to cook their meals, but the cadets set up everything and cleaned up. Pop usually helped wash dishes. He and his fellow students knew of the developments in the world and that sooner or later they would get caught up in it.

## Chapter Twenty Seven

President Roosevelt had fought Congress to supply England with all the U.S. could provide. Convoys from New York would form up thirty to sixty ships at a time and set sail across the Atlantic. German U-Boats would lie in wait for them and blast the sluggish merchant ships out of the water, striving to starve the British into capitulation. In this crucial lifeline and soon also when Germany attacked the Soviet Union, in the supply lifeline from the United States to the Soviets going to the Soviet arctic ports Archangel and Murmansk a real war was fought. One merchant sailor said sometimes they'd see bobbing lights in the distance at night, knowing they were seamen in lifeboats whose ship had been sunk, but they had explicit orders not to stop.

There was also a major supply route begun later from the U.S. to the Soviet Union through Persia, now Iran.

The U.S. population was adamantly against getting involved in another war in Europe. In a 1940 poll only 8% of the U.S. population supported the U.S. participating in Europe's war.

On June 22, 1941 Hitler launches his greatest attack of the war on the Soviet Union in Operation Barbarossa. Three and a half million men in 152 divisions, including 30 Rumanian and Finnish divisions, attacked along a fifteen hundred mile front in a three pronged attack, North, Central, and South. 3,000 tanks, 7,000 artillery pieces, and 2,500 aircraft struck. At the time the largest and most powerful invasion force in history, noted for a cruelty and ruthlessness not seen since the Mongol invasion.

Pockets of fierce resistance are encountered, but largely the Soviet Army is caught utterly unprepared. Some German panzer units advance eighty kilometers in a day. In the first few weeks over two million Soviet soldiers are killed, wounded, or captured.

The year and a half union with Stalin all suddenly changed when Hitler attacked. Planes flew ahead bombing Soviet military installations and troop encampments. German Mark III tanks drove at high speed across the Russian plains, firing on stunned Soviet troops and Soviet armor. The German blitzkrieg used so effectively to take over France of land and air envelopment worked just as well initially in making rapid, huge advances into the Soviet Union, catching the Soviet armies in huge pincer movements. Hundreds of thousands of Soviet soldiers were killed or taken prisoner. Once peaceful villages were burned or blown up, the people scattered or killed.

The attack stunned Stalin, leaving him in a stupor at one of his country dachas, unable to react. Finally in a week the communist party leaders came there to get him to take charge of the country. He thought they had come to arrest him for so trusting a tyrant such as Hitler

and for ignoring all the many intelligence signs that the Nazis were about to attack, and not starting to seriously prepare for this attack on their nation. However, he had everyone so scared of the horror he could inflict that they were afraid to initiate any independent action for fear of cruel retribution from him, so they came to him in supplication to bring him back into the leadership of the country.

At first, especially in the Ukraine, people welcomed the invading Germans as liberators from the terrible tyranny of Stalin's government. The propagandized story of the Soviet Union being a worker's paradise was in reality a terrorized police state.

In Kiev Stalin ordered the prison cells to be emptied. The prison officials and guards were ordered to kill all prisoners and flee before the Germans arrived. After the Germans took over the Kiev area, they found 100,000 prisoners murdered with their hands tied behind their backs.

In Barbarossa's opening month, German armies bit deep into Soviet territory; panzer armies encircled large Soviet forces at Minsk and Smolensk, while armored spearheads reached two-thirds of the distance to Moscow and Leningrad. But already German logistics were unraveling, while a series of Soviet counterattacks stalled the advance. In September the Germans got enough supplies forward to renew their drives; the results were the encirclement battles of Kiev in September and Bryansk-Vyazma in October, each netting 600,000 prisoners.

A communist party march in New York was getting ready to parade through New York in support of German and Soviet unity. Just before they started to step off they got the word about Germany's attack on the Soviet Union. They changed their banners to protest against Germany.

Between 1928 and 1932, when Stalin ordered the forced collectivization of the Ukrainian region, the "breadbasket of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union", crops and land was taken from the people there and became the state's property. All animals, stored grain, hidden grain, even winter clothes were forcibly confiscated. Much of this was exported outside Russia to pay for the import of equipment for the rapid industrialization of Russia ordered by Stalin.

During those years fourteen million in that area starved to death or were executed; men, women, and children. Horrible was the strife, the abject poverty in the land that had produced such food wealth that people all over were reduced to brutal, desperate lives to just keep living. All due to two men. One who by hook and crook, in the form of Lenin, whose real name was Valdimir Ilyich Ulyanov, kept from happening the possibility of an elected government in Russia; creating a system of total power and control through the communist party of the Soviet Union, and the one who pushed his way to the helm of that system of control; turning it to one of total, murderous control over a huge nation and all its people in the form of Stalin, an assumed name meaning steel. His real name is Iosif Vissarronovich Dzhugashvili, a one time seminary student who was kicked out for reading radical literature.

Stalin's complete, uncaring, abject paranoia lead him to great purges of his own people, tearing their lives and country apart. Millions lived in daily fear of their own friends, family, even children turning them into equally frightened authorities bent on proving their loyalty and saving their own hides by condemning others to the vast system of brutal, Gulag prison camps and summary executions.

Many officers and political prisoners were sent to Siberia to work in mines and wrest minerals and wood from the frozen ground. One such area was Kolyma. Its development began in 1926 and grew to some 80 camps dotting the region of platinum and gold mines,

road building, construction, and lumbering camps. Where Russians in forced labor camps were worked to exhaustion and starved till they died. Some estimates put the figure as high as three million people reportedly dying in that one area alone during the war, killed cruelly by their own government, controlled totally by Stalin. The interior access, The Kolyma Highway, with expeditions beginning its push into of the Kolyma uninhabited taiga, became known as the Road of Bones. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the author of *The Gulag Archipelago*, a book about the vast Soviet prison system, characterized Kolyma as the “pole of cold and cruelty” in the Gulag system.

Stalin, besides initiating the forced collectivization of the Great Famine in the Ukraine in 1929-1933 in which vast quantities of confiscated grain and food was exported to pay for the rapid industrialization of Russia, had also ordered the Great Purge of the communist party itself after that, resulting in the execution of many top level party officials, even one who had saved his life. He then directed the Great Terror against the Soviet people themselves, turning each person into a paragon of fear of the state, their friends, even their families. He along with Hitler was one of the most evil people in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

People were rousted out of their homes to be executed or sent to the Gulag, just as the Nazis were doing in the lands they occupied. In modern historical records put the number of deaths during 1937-1938 to be between 950,000-1,200,000. He had held the Great Purge of the communist party culminating in the Moscow show trials, and then the Great Terror to include all the nation. These numbers did not include all those millions sent to the Gulag with many dying there. In many areas the NKVD, the Soviet secret police, were given quotas of executions to fill by Stalin. His goal of absolute control of each person's life in Russia was being achieved by mass fear through terror of each individual throughout the nation.

The basis for this in Russia had been set by Lenin originally. A nationwide resolution on what kind of government Russia should have was slated to be held on 12-14, 1917. Lenin allowed it to go through in the first free election in Russia's history. He thought it would provide legitimacy for his Bolsheviks.

When after the Bolshevik Party, which Lenin founded and headed, lost by a large margin 23.3% for the Bolsheviks to 37.6% for the Socialist Revolutionaries, 12.7% for the Ukrainian Socialist Revolutionary Party and Allies, a nationwide resolution on what government Russia should have in the early formation of the Soviet Union, Lenin then banned all other political parties and crushed all opposition. His secret police executed 50,000 people in the first six weeks of its now being the only major power in Russia willing to kill freely any opposition. This methodology of governing had been foretold by Lenin himself in 1905, long before the October 1917 communist takeover, when he said, “If you disagree with us, allow us to put you up against the wall and shoot you.”

Stalin, leaving no area of national life untouched with his horror, had launched a purge of the Soviet military in the late 1930's. Every officer with the rank of major and above was suspect in Stalin's world. Eighty percent of the officer Corps in the Soviet Army were either imprisoned in the Gulag, demoted, or executed. Some were brought back into the positions after the Winter War with Finland, but the Soviet Army was severely gutted.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the Russian author mentioned, of several famous novels of Stalinist Russia, was a Soviet Army major caught up in Stalin's paranoiac purge of the Soviet military. He was taken for years into the bowls of the Soviet Gulag, the brutal Soviet prison system, because of some mild criticism of the government he had written in a personal letter home to his mother.

Once Stalin pushed his way into absolute power as head of the communist party in the Soviet Union, he had systematically murdered all possible and imagined opponents throughout the country and within the communist party in great, deadly purges during the late 20's and all during the 1930's.

Stalin had started a brutal, forced collectivization of all farm production and privately owned land throughout Ukraine in 1929 through 1933, confiscating people's food, all grain stored, winter clothing, animals and equipment, leaving them literally to starve. The goal was to bring everything under the control of the communist government, with the people able to exist only at the behest of the Soviet government, with what meager food they were allowed to live on released only through the government cadres, who themselves made sure they and their families ate very well.

Those that owned any land and had any position were considered Kulaks, enemies of the people. They were either imprisoned and shot or hanged there locally, or exiled to places in the frozen north where they died. The people in the towns they were sent to had strict orders from the government not to feed or aid them.

This forced confiscation of all it took for people to live was called "elimination by starvation" by the NKVD, the Soviet police enforcers; forcing the people to be totally subservient to the government in every part of their lives. The depravity of the Soviet brutalization during the years of 1929 to late 1933 in the Ukraine was horror on a vast scale. The Soviet government was totally uncaring in its goal of total control over the land and its people.

Thirty years later Chinese Communist Party Chairman, Mao ze Dong, followed the same Stalinist pattern in China through the Chinese communist party's collectivization of farms and their people 1959-1963, bringing all under the control of the communist by confiscating all farm food so the people would have to totally rely on what the government decided to let them have. Over thirty million of his own people starved to death under Mao's directives during this time. This doesn't count the children that would otherwise have been born to these people, estimated to be at least another thirty million people.

On that Sunday, June 22, 1941, Germany attacked a self weakened and self deluded Soviet Union. The attack had originally been planned for May 15. At the time the Soviet Union had more planes and tanks than any other government in the world, but a large portion were a bit outdated, and their military had a shaky command structure due to the ravages of Stalin's purges.

Having ignored insistent British intelligence reports that Germany was preparing to attack it, Stalin continued his refusal of preparations for such an attack, saying it might provoke Germany into aggression. He was also directly warned by his own secret agent, Richard Sorge, in the German Embassy in Japan. Sorge, with a Russian mother and a German father, had grown up in Germany but joined the German communist party and became a dedicated Marxist. He had become an officer in the Soviet foreign military intelligence service, the GRU. Stalin trusted Hitler to keep their agreement of non-aggression more than he trusted multiple credible reports.

This secret agent, well connected with important people in Japan's government, had told Stalin of Japan's plans for moving into Southeast Asia and probable moves against the United States. Stalin didn't forward the warnings to America.

Some German front line units covered as much as 30 miles a day in their advancing into the Soviet Union. Hundreds of thousands of Soviet soldiers were taken prisoner in the first few weeks as the Germans used large pincer tactics to encircle them.

After the Nazis consolidated their conquest through an area, came special units to control the land and the population and to eliminate them to make way for Aryan settlers. These units were called Einsatzgruppen. In just one example, an SS company assigned to neutralize the civilian population, especially the Jews, killed 90,000 men, women, and children in three weeks. In most instances the people rounded up by these Nazi death squads were marched out to the edge of a town into the surrounding forests and then required to dig their own graves before being gunned down.



*Young girls pose in a yard in the town of Eisiskes*

A group of young girls poses in a yard in the town of Eisiskes, Lithuania. The Jews of this shtetl (small towns with large Jewish populations.), including all of the young girls shown here, were murdered by the Einsatzgruppen on September 21, 1941. Photo taken before September 1941. *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of The Shtetl Foundation*

There were tombstones dating from as early as 1097 at the former Jewish cemetery, making Eishishok(Eisiskes) one of the oldest Jewish settlements in Eastern Europe. In the 18th century, the Jewish population accounted for about half of the population, and as the town grew, the proportion of Jewish residents increased, hitting a peak of 80% in 1820. Jews dominated trade and crafts: in 1935 out of 117 enterprises, 106 belonged to Jews. Eisiskes was part of the Second Polish Republic formed between the wars.

German troops arrived in Eišiškės on June 23, 1941, and on September 21, 1941, an SS Mobile Killing Squad entered the town, accompanied by Lithuanian auxiliaries. More than four thousand Jews from Eishishok and its neighboring towns and villages were first imprisoned in three synagogues and then taken in groups of 250 to the old Jewish cemetery where SS men ordered them to undress and stand at the edge of open pits. There, Lithuanian auxiliary troops shot them to death.

There are no known Jews living in the town today. The history of Jewish Eyshishok has been documented in the book *There Once Was A World* by Yaffa Eliach, professor at Brooklyn College.

Einsatzgruppe A - fanned out from East Prussia across Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia toward Leningrad (now St. Petersburg). It massacred Jews in Kovno, Riga, and Vilna.

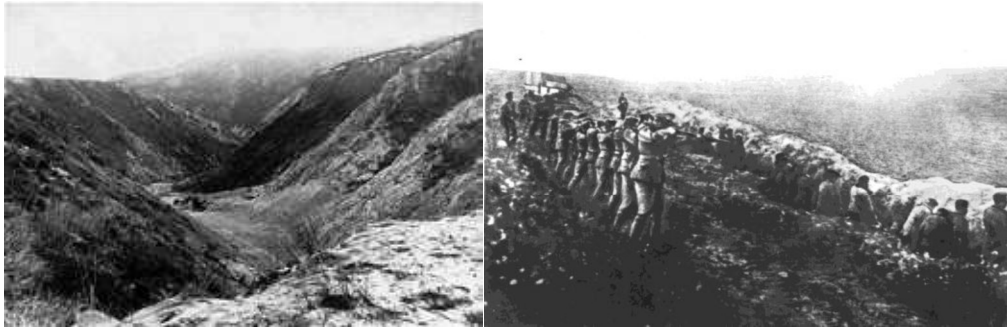


Einsatzgruppe B - started from Warsaw in occupied Poland, and fanned out across Belorussia toward Smolensk and Minsk, massacring Jews in Grodno, Minsk, Brest-Litovsk, Slonim, Gomel, and Mogilev, among other places.

Einsatzgruppe C - began operations from Krakow (Cracow) and fanned out across the western Ukraine toward Kharkov and Rostov-on-Don. Its personnel directed massacres in Lvov, Tarnopol, Zolochov, Kremenets, Kharkov, Zhitomir, and Kiev, where famously in two days in late September 1941 units of Einsatzgruppe detachment 4a massacred 33,771 Kiev Jews in the ravine at Babi Yar.

Einsatzgruppe D - operated farthest south of the four units. Its personnel carried out massacres in the southern Ukraine and the Crimea, especially in Nikolayev, Kherson, Simferopol, Sevastopol, Feodosiya, and in the Krasnodar region.

The Einsatzgruppen received much assistance from German and Axis soldiers, local collaborators, and other SS units. Einsatzgruppen members were drawn from the SS, Waffen SS (military formations of the SS), SD, Sipo, Order Police, and other police units.



Left: View of the ravine at Babi Yar circa 1944. On September 29-30, 1941, more than 33,000 Jewish residents of Kiev were marched to this site and systematically gunned down over the edge of the ravine by members of the *Sonderkommando 4a* of *Einsatzgruppen C*. Thousands of Gypsies and Soviet POWs were also executed at this site between 1941 and 1943. The specifics of the picture on the right aren't known. It shows people kneeling in front of the ditch they dug, waiting to be shot.



Jews on their way out of the city of Kiev to be executed at the Babi Yar ravine pass corpses in the street.

*Photo credit: Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, courtesy of USHMM Photo Archive*



Two pictures showing Jewish

women and children being assembled for execution after being ordered to discard their outer clothing and possessions on October 16, 1941 in Lubny, the Ukraine. *Photo credit: Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives*

When the Nazis took Kiev in the Ukraine on September 19, the special SS squads carried out orders to exterminate all Jews and Soviet officials there. On September 29 more than 33,000 Jews were marched in groups to the Babi Yar ravine north of the city, many carrying shovels. They were ordered to strip and then machine gunned into the ravine. Between then and 1943 thousands more Jews, Soviet officials and Russian POWs were executed this way at Babi Yar.

When the German armies retreated from the USSR, the Nazis attempted to hide these massacres by exhuming the bodies and burning them in huge pyres.

Some two and a half million Jews, Slavs, Soviets and nationalities of other people were killed this way. One historian gives a figure as high as three million non-Jews were murdered in the Ukraine.

In the Holocaust, Iosif Zisels, co-president of the Association of Jewish Organizations and Societies in Ukraine said that of the all the Jews killed in the Holocaust, 1.5 to 1.6 million were Ukrainian Jews or one in four. This was a holocaust by bullets. In Rava Ruska in the Ukraine had a camp where 25,000 Soviet prisoners were killed by the Germans. A once thriving town with 42 percent of the population Jewish.

The Gestapo oversaw these activities and of concern to Himmler, head of the SS, was that some of the German soldiers in these squads soon began to have mental and emotional problems with their shooting of so many innocent men, women, and children.

This started the Nazi regime to plan a better, more efficient way to eliminate large numbers of undesirables in countries they occupied, especially Jews. There were various methods tried such as packing people into closed truck holds where the exhaust would be funneled in, smothering the people to death. All these were inefficient and expensive. Killing by bullets was inefficient and time consuming in disposing of the bodies, besides the effect it had on the troops doing the killing.

Then in the conferences held on this "problem", the technique of industrial murder formed in the gassing of entire populations. But what would work best and how to quickly dispose of so many bodies?

Orders were given to line up the logistics to transport people to these camps to exterminate them, dispose of their bodies, and to also transport them en mass to thousands of slave labor camps to produce goods for the Nazi war machine and the German nation and

its people. Slave labor camps and concentration camps had already been established early on in the Nazi regime, but this was murder on an efficient, industrial scale.

Of the five million Soviet troops captured by the Germans during the war, only two and a half million lived to return home. A large percentage were shot in the overrun lands, or starved and gassed to death in the Nazi industrial murder machine being developed just as the Jews and Gypsies were, as well as Polish prisoners. One historian puts the Soviet troops deaths in the hands of the Nazis at three million.

This murderous Nazi regime and the Japanese, Pop and his fellow soldiers, marines, sailors, and airmen would put their lives on the line to stop. The Nazi self importance ignored the fact that in many areas they overran, especially in the Ukraine, they were looked upon initially as liberators, freeing the people from the hell of Stalin's murderous oppression. As the German troops passed through the towns they overran often they were cheered and women would bring them flowers and fruit.

In May 1941 Reinhard Heydrich drew up regulations with Quartermaster general Eduard Wagner for the upcoming invasion of the Soviet Union, which ensured that the *Einsatzgruppen* and the German army would co-operate in murdering Soviet Jews.

On 31 July 1941, Hermann Göring gave written authorization to Heydrich to ensure the co-operation of administrative leaders of various government departments in the implementation of a "Final Solution to the Jewish question" in territories under German control. On 20 January 1942, Heydrich chaired a meeting, now called the Wannsee Conference, to discuss the implementation of the plan.

On 10 October 1941, Heydrich was the senior officer at a "Final Solution" meeting of the RSHA in Prague that discussed deporting 50,000 Jews from the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia to ghettos in Minsk and Riga. Given his position, Heydrich was instrumental in carrying out these plans since his Gestapo was ready to organize deportations in the West and his *Einsatzgruppen* were already conducting extensive killing operations in the East. The officers attending also discussed taking 5,000 Jews from Prague "in the next few weeks" and handing them over to the *Einsatzgruppen* commanders Arthur Nebe and Otto Rasch.

Establishing ghettos in the Protectorate was also planned, resulting in the construction of Theresienstadt, where 33,000 people would eventually die. Tens of thousands more passed through the camp on their way to their deaths in the East. This was Terezin, where Anka and her husband Bernd were imprisoned to be joined by more relatives later.

In 1941 Himmler named Heydrich as "responsible for implementing" the forced movement of 60,000 Jews from Germany and Czechoslovakia to the Lodz (Litzmannstadt) Ghetto in Poland.<sup>[112]</sup>

Rudolf Höss, the commandant of Auschwitz, and Adolf Eichmann searched for a faster way to kill. They decided to try Zyklon B, a well known pesticide. It was also used throughout the war to fumigate buildings, ships and granaries.

On September 3, 1941, 600 Soviet prisoners of war and 250 Polish prisoners who were no longer able to work were forced into the basement of Block 11 at Auschwitz I, known as the "death block," and Zyklon B was released inside. All died within minutes.

Just days later, the Nazis transformed the large morgue room at Crematorium I in Auschwitz into a gas chamber and made 900 Soviet prisoners of war go inside for

"disinfection." Once the prisoners were crammed inside, Zyklon B pellets were released from a hole in the ceiling. Again, all died quickly.

Zyklon B had proved to be a very effective, very efficient, and very cheap way to kill large numbers of people.

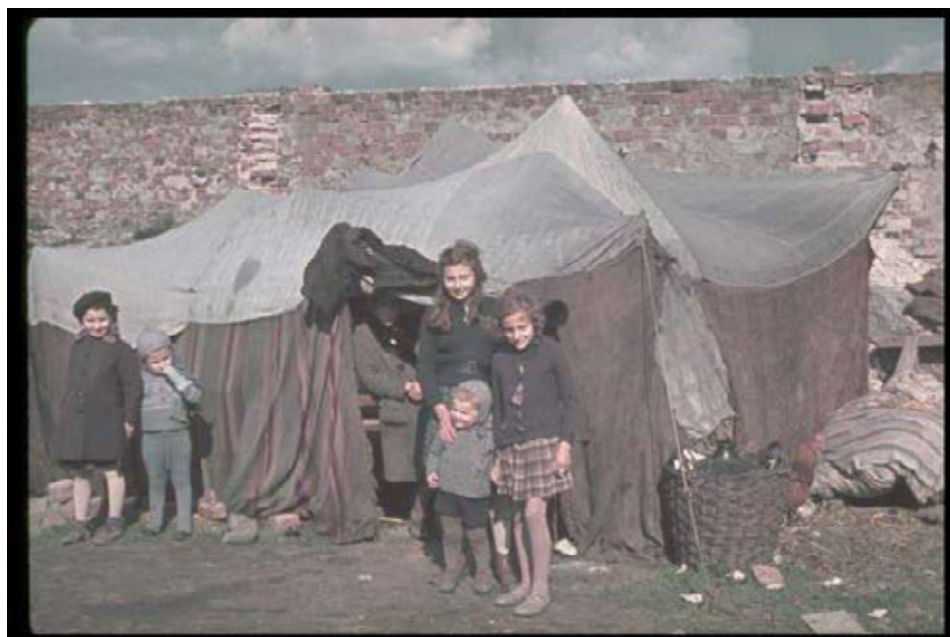
Adolph Eichmann joined the Nazi Party and the SS in 1932. He had a history of dealing with the Jewish "Question", conducting surveillance of Jewish organizations and organized the Central Office for Jewish Emigration, causing forced emigration of 110,000 Austrian Jews between August 1938 and June 1939. After the foundation of the RSHA, (The Reich Main Security Office Reichssicherheitshauptamt) Eichmann became director of section IV D4 (Clearing Activities) and then in March 1941 director of section IV B 4 (Jewish Affairs, or Judenreferat). He was to be in charge of transporting Jews from all over Europe to the killing centers. RSHA chief Reinhard Heydrich asked Eichmann to prepare a presentation for the Wannsee Conference on the implementation of the "Final Solution".

The killing centers not only murdered Jews, but millions of Soviet Prisoners of War, Poles, Gypsies, political prisoners, and any people considered "undesirable" to the Reich.

Eichmann and his henchmen organized the deportation of Jews from Slovakia, the Netherlands, France, and Belgium. In 1943 and 1944 came the Jews from Greece, northern Italy and Hungary in 1944, where he involved himself personally on the ground in deporting 440,000 Hungarian Jews to the death centers. This would be organizing Nazi troops and Hungarian police and auxiliary units to suddenly force people out of their homes onto rail cattle cars to be transported to death camps.

#### Children Were Not Spared

Photographed in 1940, unaware of what the world was coming into, these innocent children smile before the camera. Behind them is a tent made of tattered clothing, built within the Kutno Ghetto, where Polish prisoners were crowded and forced to work under Nazi command.



## Chapter Twenty Eight

### The Gassing Process

With the construction of Auschwitz II (Birkenau), Auschwitz became one of the largest killing centers of the Third Reich.

As Jewish and other "undesirables" were brought into the camp via train, they underwent a Selektion (screening) on the ramp. Those deemed unfit for work were sent directly to the gas chambers. However, the Nazis kept this a secret and told the unsuspecting victims that they had to undress for a shower. Sometimes they would be given a towel and a bar of soap to help with the lie so that the condemned would go peacefully to be killed.

Led to a well-camouflaged gas chamber with fake shower heads, the prisoners were trapped inside when a large door was sealed behind them. Then, an orderly, who wore a mask, opened a vent on the roof of the gas chamber and poured the amethyst-green colored Zyklon B pellets down the shaft. He then closed the vent to seal the gas chamber.

The Zyklon B pellets turned immediately into deadly hydrogen cyanide gas upon contact with air as it flowed down to the floor and started filling the room. In a panic and gasping for air, prisoners would push, shove, and climb over each other to reach the door. But there was no way out. Within five to 20 minutes (depending on the weather), all inside were dead from suffocation.

Heydrich was later appointed Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia. He started a campaign of terror with mass arrests, executions and deportations to ghettos and concentration camps to try and crush all Czech resistance. The Czech government in exile resolved to kill Heydrich. Two Czech citizens who had parachuted into Czechoslovakia attacked his car at a hairpin turn on a Prague suburb road, mortally wounding him.

In retaliation Hitler ordered 10,000 random Czech citizens to be caught and killed. However, the Nazi deputy under Heydrich for Czechoslovakia argued that this would hurt important war production in the forced labor factories turning out weapons and equipment for the Reich.

So two villages, Lidice and Ležaky, near Prague, from which Czech officers in the Czech government in London had originated were targeted. All males over the age of 16 in both villages were murdered. All the women in Ležaky were also murdered. All but four pregnant women from Lidice were sent to Ravensbruck concentration camp and the four pregnant women had forced abortions then sent to the concentration camp. Some children were sent to be Germanized and 81 killed in gas vans at the Chelmino extermination camp. Both villages were burned with Ležaky leveled in being used in artillery practice. In all over 1,300 Czechs were killed.

This was the only government sponsored assassination of a senior Nazi leader during the war.

*The highest government-sponsored assassination against the Japanese took place on April 18, 1943, when a squadron of 16 USAAF Lockheed P-38 Lightning aircraft intercepted two Mitsubishi G4M Bombers, one carrying the Japanese Pacific Area Commander Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, the planner of the Pearl Harbor and Midway attacks. The bombers were escorted by six Mitsubishi Zero fighters. On April 14, 1943 U.S. Naval Intelligence "Magic" had intercepted Yamamoto's flight schedule of an inspection tour of Japanese bases in the*

*South Pacific. President Roosevelt ordered Naval Secretary Frank Knox to "Get Yamamoto" Knox then ordered Admiral King, Chief of Naval Operations, who then ordered Admirals Nimitz and Hasley to carry out the mission. A dog fight ensued against the six Zeros escorting Yamaoto. As the Admiral's plane was escaping the melee, and getting away, U.S. First Lt. Rex Barber, in a desperate scan of the sky saw it flying low across the jungle canopy. He turned toward it, first got off a burst at distance to make sure his guns were working properly, and that was the burst that shot Yamamoto's plane down.*

Heydrich had been slated to be transferred to France to suppress the growing French Resistance and later was to be put in charge of security control of all Nazi occupied lands.

The ultimate goal of the Nazis was to eliminate all Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, Slovaks, Russians, political enemies, and handicapped people in the occupied lands, to establish and maintain a race of pure Aryan people.

*Operation Reinhard (Einsatz Reinhard)* became the code name for the German plan to murder the approximately two million Jews residing in the so-called Generalgouvernement (Government General). The Generalgouvernement was the part of German-occupied Poland not directly annexed to Germany, attached to German East Prussia, or incorporated into the German-occupied Soviet Union.

Though initiated in the autumn of 1941, the operation was later named after SS General Reinhard Heydrich, chief of the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA), who died in June 1942 from injuries sustained during an assassination attempt by Czech partisans. The RSHA was the agency responsible for coordinating the deportation of European Jews to killing centers in German-occupied Poland. In January 1939, December 1940, and July 1941, Adolf Hitler and Hermann Goering had tasked Heydrich personally with drafting plans for a solution of the "Jewish question."

#### Administration of the Operation

SS General Odilo Globocnik, SS and police leader in the Lublin District of the Generalgouvernement, directed Operation Reinhard between autumn 1941 and late summer 1943. He established two departments on his staff for this purpose. The first was a deportation coordination team under SS Major Hermann Hoeffle, who was responsible for arranging personnel and transport for the planned deportations. Hoeffle also coordinated deportation operations, which were usually placed under the command of the regional SS and police commander, with regional SS and police and civilian occupation authorities.

The second department was the Inspectorate of SS Special Detachments under Criminal Police captain Christian Wirth, who was responsible for the construction and management of the three Operation Reinhard killing centers (Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka II). The Operation Reinhard killing centers were managed by small detachments of German SS and Police and guarded by detachments of police auxiliaries trained at the Trawniki training camp.

#### Goals of Operation Reinhard

As Globocnik listed them in January 1944, the aims of Operation Reinhard were:

- to "resettle" (i.e., to kill) the Polish Jews
- to exploit the skilled or manual labor of some Polish Jews before killing them
- to secure the personal property of the Jews (clothing, currency, jewelry, and other possessions)
- to identify and secure alleged hidden and immovable assets such as factories, apartments, and land.



## Operation Reinhard: Maps



European rail system, 1939

## German administration of Poland, 1942



Aktion Reinhard in the Generalgouvernement, 1942





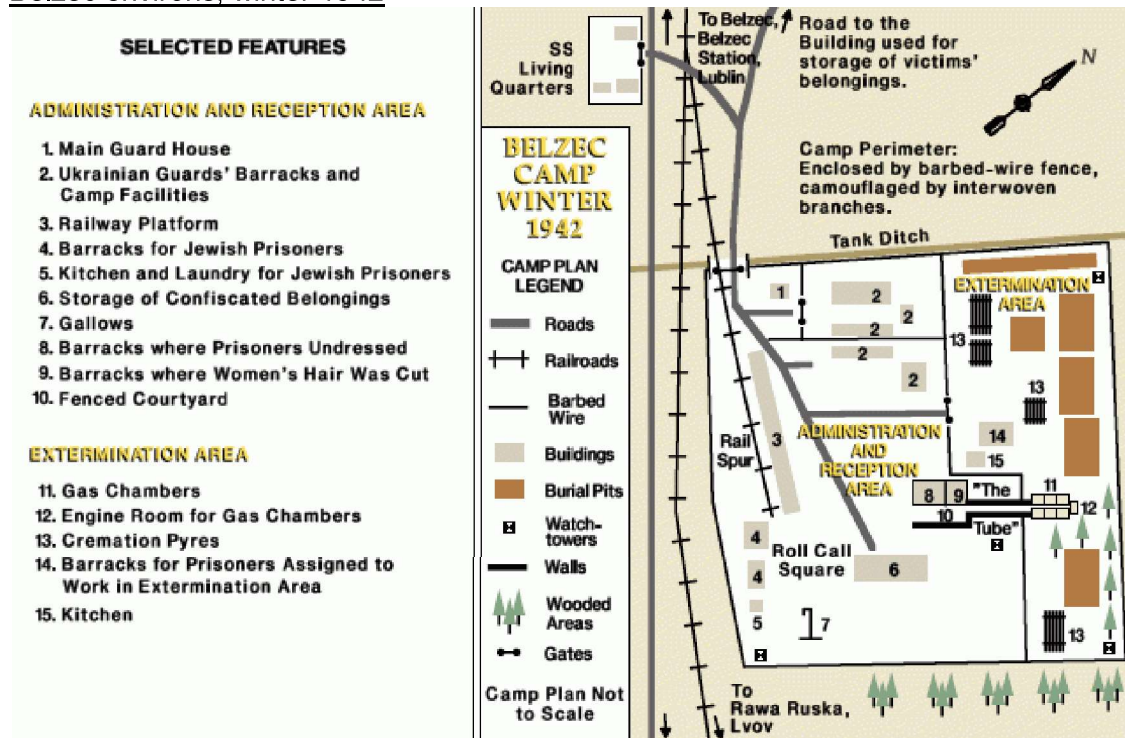
German administration of Poland, 1942



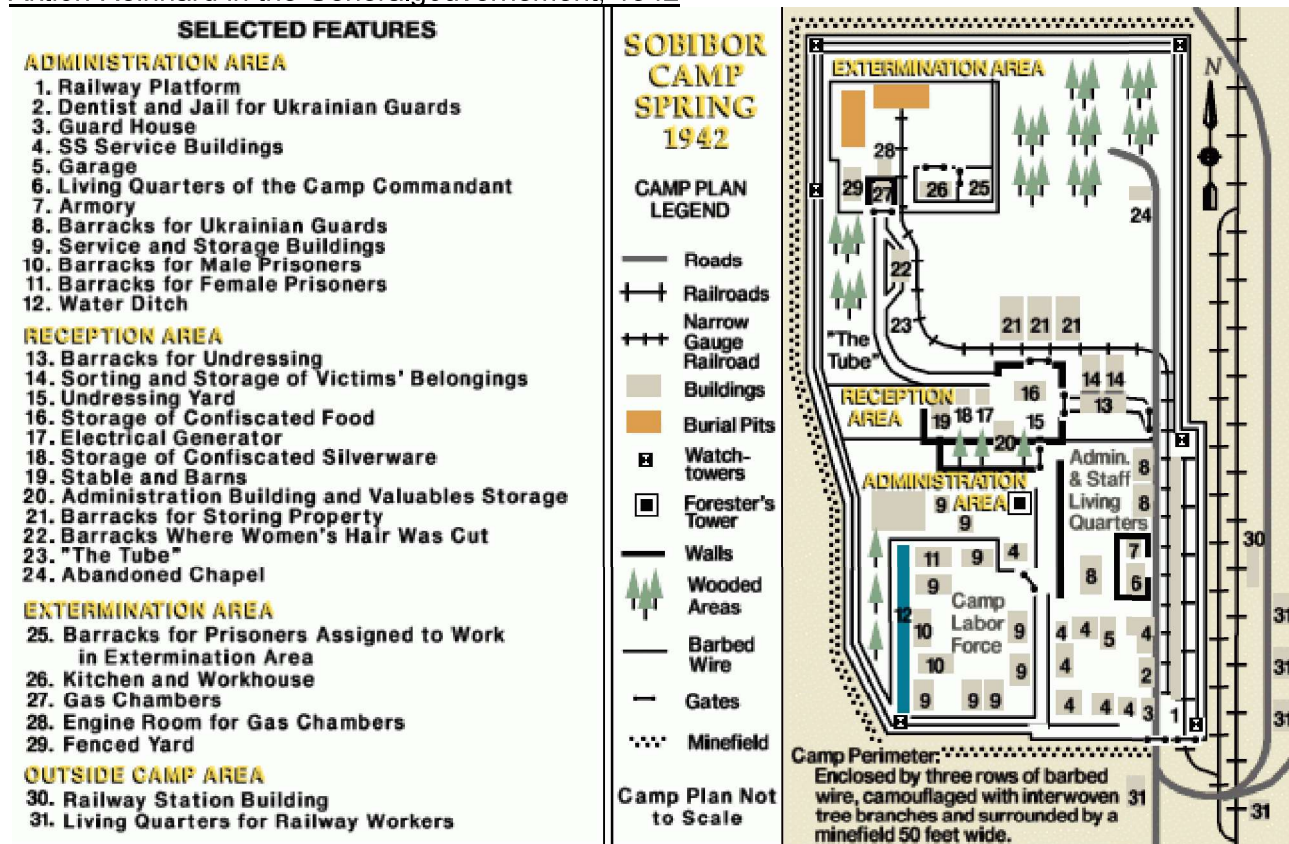
Boys' roll call at main children's concentration camp in Łódź (*Kinder-KZ Litzmannstadt*). A sub-camp was *KZ Dzierżazna*, for Polish girls as young as eight.

## Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka II

### Belzec environs, winter 1942



### Aktion Reinhard in the Generalgouvernement, 1942



### Sobibor camp, spring 1942





Over 800,000 people were murdered here, mostly Jews.

#### SELECTED FEATURES

##### LIVING AREA

1. Main Entrance
2. Camp Command & Commandant's Living Quarters
3. Ukrainian Guards' Living Quarters
4. Zoo
5. Service Building for the SS
6. Barracks for the Domestic Staff
7. Building for Sorting Gold and Valuables
8. SS Living Quarters
9. Service & Storage Buildings
10. Stables and Livestock Area
11. Barracks for Kapos & Women Prisoners
12. Barracks for Male Prisoners
13. Latrine
14. Assembly Area for Prisoners (Roll Call)
15. Entrances to Reception Area & Station Square
16. Entrance for Guards

##### RECEPTION AREA

17. Station Platform, Ramp & Square
18. Storehouse for Victims' Property (Disguised as a Train Station)
19. Burial Pits
20. Execution Site (Disguised as Hospital)
21. Reception Square (Sorting Area)
22. Latrine
23. Main Entrance to Deportation Area
24. Deportation Area
25. Barracks Where Women Undressed, Surrendered Valuables, and had Heads Shaved
26. Barracks Where Men Undressed
27. "The Tube" - Approach to Gas Chambers

##### EXTERMINATION AREA

28. 10 New Gas Chambers
29. 3 Old Gas Chambers
30. Cremation Pyres
31. Barracks for Prisoners

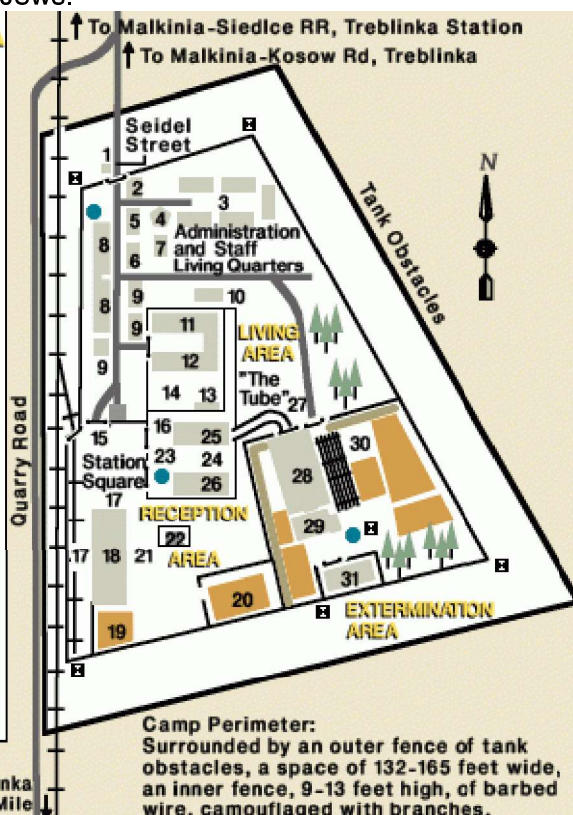
#### TREBLINKA CAMP SPRING 1943

##### CAMP PLAN LEGEND

- Roads
- Railroads
- Buildings
- Burial Pits
- Watch-towers
- Gates
- Earth Wall
- Wells
- Wooded Areas
- Barbed Wire
- Outer Fence

Camp Plan Not to Scale

To Treblinka Labor Camp, 1 Mile



Camp Perimeter: Surrounded by an outer fence of tank obstacles, a space of 132-165 feet wide, an inner fence, 9-13 feet high, of barbed wire, camouflaged with branches.

Treblinka camp, spring 1943

Construction of Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka II began in autumn 1941. Wirth, who had played a significant role in the murder of institutionalized persons with disabilities in Germany between 1939 and 1941, applied his experience of killing with carbon monoxide exhaust fumes to the construction of the Operation Reinhard killing centers. In all three camps, Trawniki-trained guards, supervised by Operation Reinhard staff, murdered their victims by using carbon monoxide gas generated by stationary engines and pumped into gas chambers. After a few test gassings using Polish prisoners and Soviet prisoners of war, killing operations at Belzec began in March 1942. They continued until December 1942. Sobibor began operating in May 1942 and remained functional until October 1943. Treblinka II opened in July 1942 and was closed in August 1943. All three were specifically death camps. At Auschwitz, where 1.3-1.4 million were sent, with 1.1 to 1.2 murdered, there was at least a chance of being chosen for slave camps.

German staff and their auxiliaries (most of them trained at the Trawniki training camp) murdered at least 434,508 Jews and an undetermined number of Poles, Roma (Gypsies), and Soviet prisoners of war in Belzec; at least 800,000 people, mostly Jews and an undetermined number of Poles, Roma, and Soviet prisoners of war in Sobibor; and approximately 925,000 Jews and an unknown number of Poles, Roma, and Soviet prisoners of war in Treblinka II.

Property belonging to the victims of the Operation Reinhard camps was stored in depots in Lublin city, at the Lublin-Majdanek concentration camp, and at the forced-labor camps Trawniki and Poniatowa.

#### Deportations to the Operation Reinhard Killing Centers



#### Deportation from the Siedlce ghetto

**Jewish women and children are transported by horse-drawn wagon during a deportation action in the Siedlce ghetto.**

**During the liquidation of the ghetto on August 22-24, 1942, 10,000 Jews were deported to the Treblinka killing center.**

The overwhelming majority of victims in the Operation Reinhard killing centers were Jews deported from ghettos in Poland. Once the killing centers were operational, German SS and police forces liquidated the ghettos and deported Jews by rail to those killing centers.

The victims of Belzec were mainly Jews from the ghettos of southern Poland, and included German, Austrian, and Czech Jews held in the Piaski and Izbica transit ghettos in Lublin District.

Jews deported to Sobibor came mainly from the Lublin area and other ghettos of the eastern Generalgouvernement; this killing center also received transports from France and the Netherlands.

Deportations to Treblinka originated mainly from central Poland, primarily from the Warsaw ghetto, but also from the Districts Radom and Krakow in the Generalgouvernement, from District Bialystok, as well as from Bulgarian-occupied Thrace and Macedonia.

#### Other Operation Reinhard Camps

Deportations to Treblinka originated mainly from central Poland, primarily from the Warsaw ghetto, but also from the Districts Radom and Krakow in the Generalgouvernement, from District Bialystok, as well as from Bulgarian-occupied Thrace and Macedonia.

#### Other Operation Reinhard Camps

Also part of Operation Reinhard were several forced-labor camps for Jews in District Lublin, including Poniatowa, the Trawniki forced-labor camp, Budzyn, Krasnik, and the Lublin/Majdanek camp before its formal conversion into a concentration camp in February 1943. For a time, Majdanek also served as a killing site for Jews whom the SS could no longer kill at Belzec in the late autumn of 1942.

Conclusion of Operation Reinhard in November 1943, after the Sobibor uprising, SS and police units shot the Jewish labor forces still incarcerated at Trawniki, Poniatowa, and Majdanek, 42,000 in all, within the framework of Operation "Harvest Festival." With the completion of "Harvest Festival," Operation Reinhard came to a conclusion, with Globocnik submitting a final report to Himmler in January 1944.

In all, the SS and police killed approximately 1.7 million Jews as part of Operation Reinhard. The victims of the Operation Reinhard camps also included an unknown number of Poles, Roma (Gypsies), and Soviet prisoners of war.



Jews being loaded onto rail cars for transport to the killing centers.

## Chapter Twenty Nine

Early on a bright Sunday morning, December 7, 1941 flights of planes started appearing over Honolulu, Hawaii and Pearl Harbor itself. They weren't given much attention until suddenly they started bombing and strafing and killing. The Japanese planes were from six carriers two hundred and forty miles north west from Pearl Harbor starting suddenly to attack. Six months of warnings to the U.S. by British intelligence in the Far East was largely ignored or lost. The invading planes were even seen by a new radar station recently installed on Hawaii. A young lieutenant reported this sighting to his captain at headquarters but it was explained away as a flight of B-17s coming in from the U.S. mainland.

In 1927, General Billy Mitchell had tried to warn U.S. Army Air Command of the threat of such an attack. He was basically vilified. He said, "It will probably take place on some sunny, Sunday morning." In 1921 he had proved the validity of air power when he put together a demonstration of Navel air power over conventional ship based cannons when his fliers in short order blew up, and sunk several steel naval ships that were retired from service.

The invasion by Japan on Manchuria in 1931 expanded slowly into China, with the Second Sino-Japanese war in 1937 accelerating that expansion. Emperor Hirohito considered his divine right to rule Asia under Japanese rule in the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. What came to be called the Rape of Nanking occurred in the six weeks from December 13, 1937 into January 1938. As many as 300,000 Chinese were killed. One estimate by the Military Tribunal in 1946 estimated 150,000 Chinese "war prisoners" and 50,000 civilian males were murdered, plus 20,000 to 80,000 Chinese women raped, brutalized, with many killed. However, there were many thousands of bodies dumped into the Yantze River and others buried and burnt. It was unspeakable atrocities carried out on families and the entire population. The Japanese commander, General Matsui Iwane, had given the order for Nanking to be destroyed. One American counsel had said he couldn't conceive the Japanese soldier could be so savage. This was genocide.

In 1940 Japan invaded French Indochina in an effort to embargo all imports to China, including war supplies purchased from the U.S. This caused the U.S. to embargo all oil exports to Japan, with most coming from the U.S. The Japanese Navy estimated it then had less than two years of bunker oil remaining to support plans to seize oil resources in the Dutch East Indies.

Planning for the Pearl Harbor attack had begun in early 1941. All Japan had to do was to pull out of China and cancel plans for the attack on South East Asia and the Philippines, but the increasingly militaristic rule of Emperor Hirohito and his military commanders would not consider that. In mid 1940 President Roosevelt had ordered the Pacific fleet to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Believing this would exert a "restraining influence" on Japanese ambitions. His advisors thought it the wrong place for the fleet.

Forty minutes before the first Japanese planes struck an unknown submarine was spotted by the U.S. Ward, a small cruiser. The Ward was manned largely by Navel students but nevertheless put up an accurate enough fire and sank the sub. Another sub by accident was beached on a Hawaiian shore and its officer captured, becoming the first enemy soldier captured by America in the war. Still, the alarm wasn't sounded even with this first hostile action of the war for America.

After the Ward sunk the Japanese midget sub planes appeared low over Honolulu and Pearl, diving without warning to strafe and drop bombs on American warships lined up in the harbor. The attack was an action to keep the U.S. Pacific Fleet from interfering with military action by the Empire of Japan was planning against nations in South East Asia and overseas territories of the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and the United States. World War II for America had begun.

Prentis Moore from Pop's old saw mill town of Manning, Texas was in the barracks eating with his fellow Marines when they heard planes flying low right over them. Rushing outside to see the red sun on the sides of the planes, some with rifles handy started shooting up at the attacking Japanese. Prentis escaped unscathed.

Another man from Lufkin was asleep in his bunk on Ford Island in Pearl Harbor when he was awakened by a loud bang. Soon fires were raging and he pitched in to fight them. Young children picked up shiny bullet casings that fell in their yards in Honolulu neighborhoods. The attack lasted a little over two hours. 29 of the attacker's planes were shot down. Severe damage was done to the United States Pacific Fleet. The great strategic loss for the Japanese was a storm that had come up out on the ocean, keeping the American aircraft carriers out to sea for another day instead of their scheduled arrival in Pearl Harbor earlier, to otherwise have been there as fat targets during the Japanese attack. These were the USS Yorktown, the USS Lexington, the USS Saratoga, and their escort ships. The carriers would play an immediate, crucial role early in the coming battles.

More than 20 ships were sunk or destroyed. 188 U.S. aircraft were destroyed. The Navy had 2,008 men killed, the U.S. Army 218, the Marines 109 killed, and 68 civilians were killed. Close to two thirds of those who died occurred in the first fifteen minutes when the Oklahoma, Utah, and the Arizona were bombed with almost half of the total killed being on the USS Arizona. 1,282 were wounded in the attack.

Sailor Ivan Harris pulled a guy from the water. "He was burned. His skin was hanging off him. He screamed, 'Don't touch me!' But we had to pull him in." Sailors trapped below deck on the USS Oklahoma were finally rescued after 38 hours. They had almost succumbed to suffocation and told of how wonderful it was to breathe fresh air. One of the sailors killed that day was William Ball, from Fredericks, Iowa. He was boyhood buddies with the five Sullivan brothers from nearby Waterloo, Iowa. When they received word of their friend's death, seeking to avenge him, they marched down and enlisted together in the Navy. The Navy agreed to let them stay together. All five brothers would all be lost when the U.S.S. *Juneau* went down on November 14, 1942 off Guadalcanal.

The Japanese actually come up very short in their attack. Besides missing the U.S. carriers, they missed and left untouched the large fuel dumps, torpedo storage sheds, submarine pens, and especially the ship repair facilities. Without these the Pearl Harbor functions might have had to be transferred to the west coast, effectively succeeding the entire Pacific militarily to the Japanese Empire for a time.



## Chapter Thirty

December 7, 1941 was the last day of professional football for the year. Sammy Baugh from Texas Christian University, the quarterback for the Washington Redskins, was leading them to a 20-14 win over the Philadelphia Eagles at Griffith Stadium. Midway in the first quarter Admiral Bandy was called over the public address system. Next the Philippine Commissioner to the U.S. Soon newspaper editors, the police superintendent, key Army and Navy officers. More calls came. The crowd was abuzz. A young Navy ensign in the stands, John Fitzgerald Kennedy didn't find out why until listening to his car radio on the way home.

The bombs were still falling when most Americans heard the stunning news via radio. Millions were listening to the Columbia Broadcasting System that afternoon as the New York Philharmonic were tuning up. John Daly's familiar voice broke in, "We interrupt this program to bring you a special news bulletin. The Japanese have attacked Pearl Harbor." Many people didn't know where Pearl Harbor was.

Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox broke through to President Roosevelt, who had left explicit instructions not to be disturbed. "No!" The President exclaimed when told. Knox read him the signal he had received from Navel headquarters in Hawaii. "Air raid on Pearl Harbor. This is not a drill." At first shocked, Roosevelt swung into action, barking orders into the phone like a captain on the bridge of a ship, summoning top officials to get the nation organized for war.

Secretary of State Cordell Hull, a Tennessean with the temper and language of a mule skinner, was told by the President to receive the two Japanese envoys waiting to meet with Hull, to receive them coolly and formally and bow them out. Hull had been reading secret Japanese messages for a year as the U.S. had broken their diplomatic code. He knew they were there to tell him there was no further need for any ongoing negotiations. The two Japanese didn't know their country had attacked the U.S. without warning. Secretary Hull did just as Roosevelt asked.

But the Japanese planner of the Pearl Harbor attack and who had also argued against it, Admiral Yoshiro Yamamoto, had lived and gone to school at Harvard in America in his youth. There he had learned to gamble at poker. But there he also learned of the unbridled resources and awesome, untapped production potential of the United States. He had said that the Japanese would run free across the Pacific for six months, then the almost unlimited production might of the United States would come to bear and Japan would be in a decline from there on. Yamamoto never said the quote about waking the sleeping giant. He referred to kicking a rabid dog in a memo later to Japan's naval command. It wasn't meant as an

insult. It was a warning of what they had done and they would likely get badly bitten. He respected America and liked Americans, but his loyalty was to his emperor and Japan.

Back at Texas A&M College in the hours following, radio reports started coming in about the attack on America with Pop hearing of the attack about eight o'clock that Sunday night.

In Lufkin, Texas Lola Will Taylor, who was Lola Will Powell from old Manning, before marrying, was sitting on her couch listening to the radio when the news came. She immediately thought of her brother Robert Powell at Texas AMC, knowing with such news he had to be involved in the coming world war, as there was no question there would be war. Powell was in some of the same engineering classes with Pop.

The American command in the Philippines received radio word of the Pearl Harbor attack eight hours before any Japanese attack in the Philippines area. American servicemen in the idyllic tropical assignments of the Philippines upon hearing the news were ready to fight with what little they had. Thousands of promised troop reinforcements, antiaircraft, engineer, and other military elements plus various Curtiss P-40B and P-40 E pursuit planes and B-17s were to arrive in 1942. Gen. Douglas MacArthur estimated that the Japanese wouldn't be ready to launch effective offensive operations before early 1942. In the Far East confusion reigned as Japanese Imperial forces struck simultaneously at Hawaii, Guan, Wake Island, British Malaya, Singapore, Thailand, and Hong Kong.

Lt. Gen. Richard Sutherland in the Philippines, refused an audience to Major Gen. Lewis Brereton who was seeking to strike Japanese air forces at their Formosa base to try and blunt the Jap attack on its way. Instead a few B-17s were flown south without bombs to try and save the planes.

The U.S. planes in the Philippines largely sat on the tarmac at Clark Field and were blown up by the attacking Japanese. Some young Army pilots managed to get in some attacks with patched up P-40s.

The U.S. and Philippine armies fought with tremendous courage against a sudden, massive Japanese invasion of land, sea, and air. Systematically the Allied forces were forced back onto the Bataan Peninsula.

There were some short tactical successes. Due to supply snafus ample food, weapons, and ammunition available only got to the fighting troops in sporadic trickles, and still they held out.

On April 3, the Japanese flotilla originally destined for Australia arrived in the Philippines instead, and led to a new surge of Japanese attacks. "There was no time during the morning, noon, or night that there was not a gunshot. Our machine guns got so hot the barrel would just curve," Lester Tenney recalled in an interview with the Atomic Heritage Foundation in 2013.

By this time, there was a shortage of food and medicine. Reduced to less than half-rations per man, survivors recalled eating an officer's polo pony, then even iguanas, snakes and jungle insects and plants. Malaria and dysentery also ravaged the camp, along with the non-stop noise of shelling and bombing. At the time of surrender, about a third were sick or wounded, note historians Everett Rogers and Nancy Bartlit.

On April 8, General MacArthur sent orders that the men were not to surrender. However, Major General Edward P. King, the Commanding General of the Philippine-American forces in Bataan, knew that the men were at risk of dying and defied the orders.

12,000 U.S. and 58,000 Filipino soldiers already beaten down physically and malnourished became prisoners in the largest surrender in U.S. history. They had been fed a stream of official, false positive news of promised reinforcements and naval fleets coming to their rescue to try and keep them fighting at their best.

They were forced marched for days under a hot sun with almost no food or water. The Japanese had planned for one third the number. Japanese General Homma, had said that prisoners were to be treated with a "friendly spirit". Amid the massive movement of so many people, refugees, Japanese soldiers moving to front areas where Americans and Filipino were trying to fight, had a broken chain of command, or no command from the Japanese commanders, so the American and Filipino soldiers were thrust into a second life of absolute hell. Each Japanese soldier had been indoctrinated into the code of Bushido, teaching the paramount goal of life was death in its glorious fealty to the emperor and Japan. Anyone who surrendered defied his destiny of death, betrayed his country, family, and his comrades. This murderous contempt was taken to its most horrible end with beheadings, bayoneting, starving, and the continuous torture of American and Filipino POWs.

During the Hike as the POWs called the Bataan Death March, Filipino civilians who tried to help the long, straggling line of helpless men were themselves sometimes burned to death or gutted by Japanese held machetes, bayonets or knives.



The Japanese rounded up the captured men into long columns and told them to start marching. For the next seven days, the men were forced to walk 65 miles in tropical temperatures over 100 degrees, given no food or water, and rested rarely. One historical estimate gives 10,000 Filipinos and 700 Americans died on the march.

The Japanese military followed the Bushido code, which essentially stated that surrender was shameful and death was preferable. Anyone who surrendered was a coward and must be treated as less than human. Therefore, the recently surrendered American troops could be treated as less than human, and consequently were.

"It was called the death march, because of the way they killed you," Tenney said. "If you stopped walking, you died. If you had to defecate, you died. If you had a malaria attack, you

died. It made no difference what it was; either they cut your head off, they shot you, or they bayoneted you. But you died, if you fell down.”

Japanese soldiers would stick the decapitated heads of American POWs on the bayonets at the end of their rifles, and go up and down the line of struggling prisoners, pushing the heads again and again at the Americans, taunting them.

The Japanese soldiers who accompanied the march tortured and murdered freely. From using bayonets to prolong death to pushing prisoners in front of tank paths, the Japanese would even force prisoners to stand to attention in the midday sun until some would drop of heat exhaustion.

“Numerous emasculations, disemboweling, decapitations, amputations, hundreds of bayoneting, shootings and just plain bludgeoning to death of the defenseless, starved and wounded soldiers were common on the march...in full view of their helpless comrades,” said Paul Ashton, another survivor, in Rogers and Bartlit’s book, *Silent Voices of World War II*.

Along with death by torture, many men died of dysentery. Many artesian wells lined the path of the march, but any prisoner who tried to approach was killed. Desperation would lead men to resort to drinking whatever they could find.

Tenney recalled, “You would see water on the side of the road in carabao wallows. The carabao would sit in there and bathe. We would see that and spread the scum along the side and just drink the water. The result was dysentery, real bad dysentery.”

Following the end of the march, the prisoners were packed into hot steel boxcars with barely enough room to breathe. During this 45-mile ride, men continued to die from heat and exhaustion. Upon arrival, they marched ten more miles when they arrived at Camp O’Donnell, a former Filipino training base. “You are guests of the Emperor,” a Japanese official greeted them in English. “We will work you to death.”



### Camp O’ Death

Minister of War Hideki Tojo had said, “A POW who does not work, should not eat,” which translated into a death sentence for the sick and wounded at Camp O’Donnell, explain Rogers and Bartlit. Nicknamed Camp O’ Death, the survivors of the Bataan Death March that marched along with other POWs continued to die from starvation and disease.

The camp diet was *lugao*, a watery rice gruel that contained fish heads, vegetables, and usually inch-long weevils. Some POWs ate the weevils for their protein value. The prisoners

supplemented their diet with prison stew, which they made from anything edible that they stole, such as turnips, or rats.

Sick prisoners were sent to the crude hospital ward, which was nicknamed “zero ward,” as in for patients with zero hope. Rogers and Bartlit describe how patients lay there and waited to die, because there was little to no medicine. One prisoner described having his appendix removed with a sharpened spoon and no anesthetic.

Escaping from the prison might have appeared to be an option, because the fence was just a couple strands of barbed wire. However, the nearest safe zone was 9,000 miles away in Australia. The prisoners did not speak the local language and “any white captive’s skin was a prison uniform he could not take off,” explained historian Gavan Daws. In addition, the Japanese implemented a system of death squads, where they created groups of ten men POWs. If one man tried to escape, they all would be killed.

Punishments and sadistic acts continued in the prison as well. Rogers and Bartlit describe a water treatment, in which the Japanese would ram garden hoses down a prisoner’s throat or up another orifice, until the prisoner’s belly was swollen with water. Then, they would jump on the stomach. This punishment nearly always resulted in death.

They continued to die in great numbers at the brutal hand of the Japanese for the rest of the war in horrid places like Camp O’Donnell, Cabanatuan, and others. Starvation, psychological torture, physical beatings that might last for days, forced to stand for days on end with nothing to protect their heads from the merciless tropical sun, almost total lack of sanitation, food, and medicine plagued the American and Filipino POWs each day of their years of captivity at the hands of the Japanese.

In Japanese controlled Burma, in building a supply rail road for the Japanese Army during the war through the jungles there for Japan’s planned invasion of India, 30% of the Allied prisoners and 50% of the natives in forced labor under extremely harsh conditions died.

They died also from thirst and starvation on the Hell Ships as they called the slow, dirty, ill equipped merchant ships, where they were locked in overcrowded holds with almost no food or water and little air, that transported the POWs to more brutal treatment and labor in Japan itself. It never let up. Lack of news and lack of hope that America still remembered them, and would soon come to end their torturous existence added to the daily hell.

## Chapter Thirty One

It was a sober group of young men as Pop and all the Corps assembled early the next morning, December 8, 1941, on the Texas AMC campus in Guyne Hall. It was the largest indoor place on campus, toward the end of military walk.

Through the recent years in school they had heard of the various areas of conflict occurring overseas and knew at some point they would most likely be involved in them, but with the sudden attack on the U.S. itself, they knew now they would all be in the forefront of the world conflict America was thrust into. That morning all over America young men fought to get into recruiting offices. They and America were going to war

At the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor the United States had a standing Army less than that of Portugal's and just slightly larger than Switzerland's. But like Adm. Yamamoto, in England Winston Churchill also knew of the enormous manufacturing, production and military potential of America. It's rumored when he heard of Pearl Harbor he clapped his hands together and exclaimed, "We've won the war!" He and the British people had been praying for America to enter the war. President Roosevelt had skirted the neutrality laws numerous times to supply England with all the supplies he could to keep her and her forces afloat. Joseph Stalin knew the Soviet Union had gained a valuable ally in the Soviet's desperate fight against Hitler.

Hitler and Germany declared war on America three days later in support of his fellow Axis power. The Japanese attack had surprised Hitler, who hadn't been informed in advance of it. Pop said if Hitler had spent just four hours touring the auto plants in Detroit he would have thought twice about declaring war on the United States. The U. S. was an industrial bomb ready to explode into an unstoppable production juggernaut of war production and military might. The spark to set that off had just been lit.

Pop and the thousands of young men sitting there that morning were told what would happen with them. Pop's class would be allowed to graduate the next spring in early May. Mom's brother, Charles Slover, his class one behind Pop's, would miss their graduation and be put right into the Army as corporals. Most, including Charles, were sent directly to OCS, Officer Candidate School to become second lieutenants.

In Mom's high school graduating class of '42 almost all the young men were signing up to serve their country. One fellow wore glasses that looked like the bottom of glass coke bottles, blind as a bat, 4F. He wasn't getting drafted; no service would take him. He couldn't

stand it, all his friends were going off to serve and he couldn't be left hanging around Lufkin. Finally he badgered the Army recruiter so much the man let him in within certain limited duty requirements. He may have peeled potatoes in Ft. Sam in San Antonio for four years, but he served.

Three young men of recruiting age in a small mid American town who were all consistently turned down for service because of various physical reasons, tragically committed suicide.

Upon Pop's graduation in May 1942 they were sworn in as second lieutenants in the Army and were immediately put on active duty. He and a bunch of his classmates were ordered to Ft. Sam Houston in San Antonio to become part of the Second Infantry Division. Men began flooding into the large post to become part of America's answer to the world threat in conflicts that had been building for years when Japan attacked America.

The whole country of America went on rationing. Pop's brother Joe and Papaw would grow food and fiber for the nation and the war effort. Papaw received extra rations of gasoline to fuel the machinery that helped his farm produce for the nation.

Unit trains of tanker cars full of Texas crude oil chugged to east coast refineries to be made into gasoline and lubricants. War Bond drives were held on a regular basis to raise funds for the war effort. Rubber and scrap metal drives were held by people and children all across the nation. Children in neighborhoods and schools would band together to gather old car and bicycle tires, old clothes, and pieces of scrap metal to supply the war effort.



## Chapter Thirty Two

Back at Texas A&M, Uncle Charles' class weren't allowed to graduate as mentioned, but were inducted into the Army as corporals. He got sent to Officer Candidate School, successfully completing OCS. He was assigned to a post in Kansas training new recruits. Deciding this wasn't very interesting, he managed to get himself transferred to the Army paratroopers, landing in the 503 Parachute Regiment. Soon they were on their way to the Pacific and jumps into combat against the Japanese.

On April 18, 1942 sixteen B-25B Mitchell medium bombers were launched from the U.S. Hornet six hundred fifty miles from the Japanese home island. At a meeting earlier in the year in Washington D.C. President Roosevelt ordered a quick response to the Japanese attack of December 7, 1941. A small Japanese radio ship had been spotted near the Hornet flotilla. It was sunk but the raid might have been comprised, so the raid was launched immediately instead of two hundred miles closer. None of the planes and pilots had ever taken off of a carrier before.

Lt. Col. James DoLittle took off in the first bomber on a very short length of the Hornet's flight deck, followed by the others. Thank goodness they had a strong headwind to fly into, making it possible for all their overloaded planes to lift off. They headed to Japan to bomb assigned targets and then flew on to try and land at Chinese airfields. Because of the extra distance and weather, all of the crews knew their planes wouldn't make it to the airfields and they would have to crash land or bail out. One crew had brought along sandwiches to eat, but over the sea on the way to China couldn't swallow them as the anxiousness of the mission and their fate left their mouths completely dry.

One plane and its crew landed at Primorsky Krai Siberia where the plane was interned and the crew held for a year by Soviet forces.

The operation was a shock to Japan and a huge moral boost to the United States. The Japanese plans to continue through New Guinea and on down to invade Australia were pulled back. Lt. Col. DoLittle said upon bailing out, he "landed in the softest, coldest, wettest rice paddy in China."

The Chinese people and Chinese army soldiers hid the Americans and transported them to safety where they could. The Japanese army in China was relentless in its search for the American air crews. Eight of the Americans were captured and three executed with one dying in captivity. The Japanese began the little known Zhejiang-Jiangzi Campaign to

intimidate the Chinese from helping the downed American crew men, killing 250,000 Chinese civilians in the campaign.

Lt. Col. DoLittle also thought the mission a failure and that he would be court-martialed. Because of the tremendous surge it gave to America's spirits, the huge risk he and all of this men took in pulling it off, and the fact of an actual strike on Japan's home island as ordered earlier by Roosevelt; when Lt. Col. DoLittle made his way back to the U.S., he was called to Washington D.C. to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor from President Roosevelt.

Pop and a slew of recent Aggie graduates were sent to Ft. Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas and assigned to the Second Engineer Battalion of the Second Infantry Division, the Indian Head Division. The Aggies were assigned to junior officer positions throughout the Division, filling out its structure as new recruits came in to fill in the ranks and forms units to start immediate, intensive training.

The preparation urgency taking place all over the United States was in full force at Ft. Sam. Tens of thousands of raw recruits were being trained and regular officers and non-coms who had been in the Army for some years were constantly transferred out to fill leadership roles in newly formed Army units expanding all over the nation.

Col. Warren was the commander of the Second Engineer Battalion Dad was a new member of. Warren was a West Point graduate. Dad said he didn't know if it was his snappy salute or what, but Col. Warren seemed to favor Pop in leadership roles. I think Col. Warren had seen something of Pop's record as a cadet major at Texas AMC, and recognized his leadership abilities.

Initially Dad served as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion motor officer, in charge of the battalion's vehicles, for their maintenance and signing them out to Battalion personnel, carrying out his duties riding a Harley Davison motorcycle.

One of his duties, besides overseeing all the maintenance and inventory of vehicles was to drive out to the Battalion's training ground at Camp Bullis once a month to deliver their monthly payroll. So he'd pack the cycle's saddlebags with around \$40,000 in cash (\$280,000 in today's currency) and motor out to the Camp. He would go alone armed only with his .45 pistol sidearm.

All the battalion's junior officers were busy training new soldiers coming into the unit and getting acquainted with their non-commissioned officers and equipment.

Col. Warren required all the officers in his battalion to fire expert with every weapon they would be working with.

The Arsenal of Democracy was starting to kick into high gear. In the 32 years from the Wright Brothers' first flight to 1940 the U.S. had produced 75,000 planes. Roosevelt called for 60,000 in 1942 and 125,000 in 1943. The huge Willow Run airplane factor in Michigan, built from scratch and named after the creek on which it was located, had a mile long assembly line and once cranked up spit out B-24 Liberators on a rapidly increasing basis. After some initial production kinks were ironed out, by 1944 Willow Run was rolling out a B-24 every 63 minutes (some sources say every 54 minutes). It was the largest aircraft factory in the world. In all the plant produced 8,685 Liberators, each a long range bomber capable of delivering up to four tons of bombs apiece each time they roared over enemy territory.

Production czars hacked through red tape, commandeered supplies, money, and workers. Within a few weeks of the Pearl Harbor attack six billion dollars in planes and

aircraft equipment were on order. Employment in the aircraft industry rose from 100,000 in 1940 to 2 million at the peak of production.

Henry J. Kaiser, a junior high dropout, had only been in a shipyard once before being put in charge of seven shipyards. He was a 260 pounder in his early sixties who slept only four hours per night, spent \$250,000 per year in long distance phone charges, and was an organizational genius that started prefabricating parts of ships to then be assembled for faster completion. Each ship had 43 miles of welding, 5 miles of wire, and 7 miles of pipe work. He once built and launched a ship in 80 hours and thirty minutes. A landlubber, he insisted on calling the ship's bow, the "front end". His yards built one third of America's 2,716 Liberty ships, those vessels that kept England, the Soviet Union, and the European and Pacific theaters supplied.

In one 24 hour period, 27 ships, merchants and warships, were launched from the shipyards of America. The Arsenal of Democracy was on fire.

Fifty percent of the growing female work force were also full time house wives with the additional chores of shopping, cooking, and caring for children. By 1943 women comprised one third of the nation's work force. With the nation gearing up after the Pearl Harbor attack, Josephine von Miklos, a commercial designer in New York, closed her very successful studio and took a job in a New England munitions factory. Down South, the 80 year old widow of Confederate General James Longstreet stopped her retirement and joined the 8 a.m. shift at the Bell Aircraft factory in Marietta, Georgia. Women made up 2.5 million of the work force in the United States while there were 400,000 serving in the armed forces during the war. In Canada 1 million women worked in their production industries.

A design contest to come up with the best all around Army utility vehicle resulted in the Bantam Car Company submitting their design thirty minutes before the deadline, resulting in the Army jeep. This was war though, and their design was given over to be produced en masse by Willys-Overland and Ford, with the Bantam Car Company getting to produce the jeep's trailers.

Joseph Stalin was so enamored with the vehicle he kept clamoring for more through Lend-Lease. The Russian dictator did nothing to dispel the Red Army myth they were Soviet made in a secret factory beyond the Ural Mountains at a place improbably called "Willys-Overland".

Tanks, trucks, ships, aircraft carriers, ammunition, guns, uniforms, landing craft, communications gear, food, and on and on poured forth from America to the world fighting for its freedom.

The planes rolling off the Willow Run Assembly line were only part of the avalanche of armaments produced by American industry during the war. Before the conflict ended American plants turned out 296,429 airplanes, 102,351 tanks and self propelled guns, 372,431 artillery pieces, 47 million tons of artillery ammunition, 87,620 warships (included PT boats and other smaller vessels besides larger warships), and 44 billion rounds of small arms ammo. This was in addition to uniforms, food, and the many thousands of trucks used by the U.S. and sent to other Allies, especially the Soviets, to transport all material.

More than 15,000 U.S. airplanes, 8,000 of which came from Alaska, were given to the Soviet Union in the course of the war.

The USSR received a total of 44,000 American jeeps, 375,883 cargo trucks, 8,071 tractors and 12,700 tanks. Additionally, 1,541,590 blankets, 331,066 liters of alcohol, 15,417,000 pairs of army boots, 106,893 tons of cotton, 2,670,000 tons of petroleum products and

4,478,000 tons of food supplies made their way into the Soviet Union. This is in addition to the millions of tons of steel, especially sheet steel that went into the building of Soviet tanks, plus rare minerals that went into the building of 55,000 T-34 tanks, which became the main battle tank for the Soviet Army. Moreover, the Soviets used the Christie suspension system in the Soviet BT and T-34 tank series. Designed by John Walker Christie, an American engineer and inventor, this suspension system was used also in British Covenanter and Crusader Cruiser tanks, Comet heavy cruiser tank, as well as other combat vehicles.

One German general said that after the Soviets started getting the American trucks, the Soviet artillery became much more noticeably mobile.

Even such an ungrateful genocidist as the Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin acknowledged America's massively impressive achievement in a toast he proposed in late 1943 at the Teheran Conference, "to American production, without which this war would have been lost."

However, in years to come inside the Soviet Union these huge supplies in crucially helping the Soviets fight the war was purposely not mentioned in the Soviet press or history.

The ties to what the working men and women were building and supplying to our military personnel was constantly emphasized. This was directly illustrated by a seaman named Elgin Staples, whose ship went down off Guadalcanal. He was swept over the side, but was saved thanks to a life belt, that upon later examination was proven to have been inspected, packed, and stamped back home in Akron, Ohio, by his own mother.

## Chapter Thirty Three

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Ilse Kleinzahler was Gerda Weissman's closest friend. She kept Gerda informed about the latest information as she lived near the Bielitz Jewish Center, a building the Germans allowed some of the Jewish boys to lodge at in the summer of 1941. Gerda's family and all the Jews left in Bielitz had been crammed into the several run down buildings near the railroad depot.

Ilse was a great pianist. Later that year, when winter had set in, she was forced to turn over her beautiful piano to a policeman who had seen it in her house. She and Gerda walked to Ilse's home for an hour in the cold snowy wind, as they were forbidden from riding the bus.

Ilse played her piano one last time for Gerda, with her fingers running expertly through waltzes, stormy polonaises, dance melodies, and the many moods the darkening evening reflected as Gerda listened. Three and a half years later, in darkness, in a cold, wet meadow, beautiful, joyful Ilse would die in Gerda's arms. She had just turned eighteen.

Soon each of them living in the dilapidated buildings were ordered to work camps being set up by a short train ride from Bielitz. Gerda had just turned eighteen. Her father's condition didn't matter. He was forced to push a loaded wheel barrow all day at an earth moving site. Gerda and her mother worked in a shop making military uniforms. They returned at night to their room exhausted and dirty.

Soon their family would be sent to work camps being formed, and Bielitz would be *Judenrein* – clear of Jews. The night before leaving Gerda heard her parents staying up all night talking about their lives, waiting for him during World War I, how happy they had been all these years, and how after the war they would make up for the life Gerda missed, "She shall have the prettiest dresses, dancing, everything a young girl should have." She heard her mother say.

At the station the next morning they saw her father off to his work camp. He entered the last car in order to see them as long as he could, his hair steel grey in the sun, and on his breast the yellow star. She never saw her father again.

In a matter of several weeks, everyone in the buildings where they had been forced to move to were rousted out with shouts and threats. They were all herded to an open area on the edge of town.

All invalids, the very old and very young were made to board trucks amid crying and screaming as the German guards would often kick or beat them on. Gerda and her mother, along with rest of the remaining Jews of Bielitz were made to stand in a pouring rain for hours. Any jewelry and rings were taken by the SS. Earrings were torn out.

Gerda's group were marched through the town as the towns people went about their daily business, department stores decorating their display cases, places where Gerda had bought a dress, men repairing a street. Gerda saw familiar faces peering from windows.

Any laggards were beaten with truncheons by the SS men. Then they stopped at an open field and were separated by a Nazi wielding a cane, determining life and death on the spot, young and able to the left, everyone else to the right. A young couple with a baby were motioned to the left, and told to give their baby to someone on the right. They looked at each other and both, with their baby, went to the right.

Then the whole group was divided up by SS men who separated them into different trucks. Gerda's mother's last words, hollered to her from the truck her mother had been crammed into was, "Be Strong!" It was the last words she would ever hear her mother say.

They were put on trucks and drove to a small station where they were put on a train to a slave labor camp in Sosnowiec on the then Polish-German border. Industrialists paid the SS three and a half Reichsmark (about \$1.00) for each worker, plus a stipend for various services paid by the companies performed by their slaves.

They were met Appell, roll call time and again at the transit camp yard. Fifty of them were picked for work at cloth milling camps.

On the way back to the top floor of a large building where they were housed, they heard feeble voices coming from behind a door, opening it to find living skeletons of girls, clad in rags infested with vermin, stretching out begging hands. Most who had lost limbs had worked in a quarry, and the rest were too ill to continue serving the glorious Reich. They knew they were going to Auschwitz to be gassed and cremated. They had been forced to give their strength, their youth, their health, and now their lives to the glorious Reich. Gerda and her friends ran upstairs to come back and gave them all the bread they had.

After late afternoon Appell, while the girls were given some soup of ill smelling potato scraps and an unwashed greenish vegetable in a rusty bowl; Gerda noticed a group of sick girls sitting near the fence and gave one about her age her bowl of soup. The girl's head was close cropped, her body pitifully emaciated. "I did not know her name or where she came from. I only knew she was going to meet her death."

"God bless you, may you never know what hunger is." The girl said, after she hungrily finished the meager portion.

Gerda and her group were put on a train to a weaving mill, making cloth for the Reich. She made fast friends with several of the girls. Ilse was also one of the girls from Bielitz picked to go. Beautiful, upbeat Suze Kunz became a dear friend of Gerda. They saw green fields of cows pass by and curious people looking at them at the stations they passed through to Bolkenhain in eastern Germany. The same looks were given as they were marched through the city to the mill.

The stern camp supervisor, Frau Kugler, had the jaw of a bulldog and marched them to their quarters at the back of the mill, the high fence topped by barbed wire. They were taught to run the massive, fast moving looms by the mill director, Meister Zimmer, and warned if they didn't work very hard they could be replaced at any moment. Anything not conforming to German ideology would be looked upon as traitors. "Those who cannot work for our victory are not needlessly fed. Those we exterminate." He told them by way of introduction.

They worked grueling, twelve hour days, with them constantly running, the looms causing severe eye strains, the noise deafening them for hours afterward, the material difficult and the looms able to easily cause broken fingers. The material was from clothes brought from the death camps and shredded to be turned into threads and cloth for use by the Reich.

The girls were allowed to write letters to family once a month, but for awhile the only one Gerda received was one returned to her undelivered that she had written to her father. The Jewish lady in charge of them, a Mrs. Berger, firmly had her face the truth about her mother and father.

She finally received one from her brother Arthur, but its tone was not at all like his normal, vibrant, loving self. It was written as someone covering up great distress. Ilse and Suze kept her up with their total caring friendship. She met many other girls, each with fascinating, wonderful family stories and horrific tragedies getting them to where they were now. Most in their teen years.

Once when she and two others near her were too sick to rise from their beds, Frau Kugler forced them to the looms to work; "Pull yourself together, Gerda, it is a matter of life or death!" just as SS Obersturmfuhrer(First Lieutenant) Lindner, a notorious sadist came by inspecting all of them and their work. Gerda forced herself to show herself totally capable, to stand erect with her looms working fine. Otherwise she would be instantly sent to Auschwitz to be gassed. A German woman working for the SS had just saved her life.



## Chapter Thirty Four

Between June 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> 1942, occurred one of the most significant naval battles of the war. One month after the Battle of the Coral Sea and six months after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese planned to lure the remaining United States carriers into a trap. They intended to extend their perimeter by taking Midway Atoll, preparatory to attacks against Fiji and Samoa.

Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto planned the elimination of the remaining American carriers. With that and the sizing of Midway Island, with Hawaii, the only strategic islands in the eastern Pacific, was seen as expanding their sphere of control and protecting any threat against the Japanese home islands, a concern acutely heightened by the Doolittle Raid.

Thanks to American code breakers- three American carriers, the Enterprise, Hornet, and the Yorktown, and their support ships as Task Force 16 lay in wait northeast of Hawaii against the four major Japanese carrier flotilla. They were sent there by Naval Commander Admiral Chester Nimitz. U.S. Admiral Fletcher was in overall command of Task Force 16 aboard the Yorktown. The Japanese believed the Yorktown had been sunk at Coral Sea. Rear Admiral Spruance was in direct command of the Enterprise and Hornet.

Despite estimates that several months would be required to repair the Yorktown at Puget Sound on the U.S. west coast, the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard restored her to a battle ready state in 72 hours, with the Admiral Chester Nimitz ignoring reams of Naval procedures to get the job done.

The Japanese task force commander Admiral Nagumo, attacked Midway 4:30 a.m. on June 4. After the initial attack another would be necessary to land Japanese troops on Midway June 7.

Four time Academy Award winning director John Ford was on Midway and began filming the Japanese attack. A bomb landed too close to him and his film crew, severely wounding Ford in his left arm. The Marines around him were laughing, exclaiming "Boy, that was close!" He said the attitude and calmness of these eighteen and nineteen year old boys made him feel for sure the war would be won. The American pilots flying against the Japanese were mostly in their early to middle twenties.

Nagumo, ignoring the doctrine of keeping half of his aircraft in reserve, ordered his reserve planes to be re-armed with contact fused general purpose bombs for use against land targets on Midway Island. This had been underway for thirty minutes when a delayed scout plane discovered the sizable American task force to the east. He decided to recover all his planes coming back from the attack from Midway and rearm his planes for anti-ship attacks.

An American PBY patrol bomber sighting that morning of Japanese ships benefited Fletcher who ordered Spruance to launch planes toward the Japanese fleet.

An American flight, Torpedo Squadron 8, breaking formation from their main flight and seeking direction, managed to find and start their torpedo run against the Japanese carriers. All 15 American planes in that flight were shot down with only Ensign George Gay surviving after crashing into the sea. But both Fletcher's carriers had launched at 7:00 that morning. The U.S. planes were on their way and nothing Nagumo could do now would stop them. A second American flight VT6 lost many planes to the much faster Mitsubishi Zeros.

Despite their initial heavy losses, three results were achieved. The Japanese carriers were kept off balance with no ability to prepare a counterstrike, the Japanese combat air patrol was pulled out of position, and many of the Zeros ran low on ammunition and fuel. The appearance of a third American flight, Torpedo Squadron 3 at 10:00 drew the majority of the Japanese fighter cover to the southeast quadrant of the fleet.

By chance, at the same time two squadrons of American SBD dive bombers, were approaching the enemy fleet from two other directions. One flight, running low on fuel, had seen the wake of the Japanese destroyer Arashi steaming full speed to rejoin Nagumo's carrier force. They headed in that direction and found the enemy fleet just as the other American squadron arrived. The American dive bombers found armed aircraft filled the Japanese decks, fuel hoses snaked across as refueling operations took place; bombs and torpedoes were stacked around the hangers. The Japanese fighter protective escorts weren't there to confront them.

Enterprise's VB-6 air groups, commanded by Wade McClusky, split up and with their planes screaming down at sheer vertical angles, he and his wing man scored direct hits on Kaga, while Akagi to the north four minutes later was attacked by three bombers. Both enemy carriers were set ablaze and burning furiously. Yorktown's VB-3, commanded by Max Leslie, went for Soryu, scoring direct hits. Akagi was hit by just one bomb, but it penetrated into the upper hanger deck, exploding beside stacked ordinance, among fuel lines, armed and fueled aircraft, causing a massive conflation of secondary explosions and fires. In six minutes the dive bombers had knocked three Japanese fleet carriers totally out of action and changed the course of war in the Pacific. All three carriers would be abandoned and scuttled by the Japanese.

The remaining Japanese carrier, Hiryu, immediately launched a counterattack, badly damaging the Yorktown with three bombs that snuffed out her boilers. Yet U.S. damage control teams were so effective in patching her up, getting her back up moving, the second wave's torpedo bombers mistook her for the undamaged carrier the Enterprise. In contrast Japanese crews were only infrequently and lightly trained at fire fighting as it was considered "defeatist training". The Yorktown took both attacks. Both the Enterprise and Hornet were undamaged. The second major attack caused the Yorktown to list 26 degrees and she lost power.

The Hiryu, recovered its surviving aircraft and prepared to launch against what the enemy thought was only one remaining American carrier. A Yorktown scout aircraft located the Hiryu in late afternoon of the June 4 and Enterprise launched a strike of dive bombers with 10 more from Yorktown leaving Hiryu ablaze. On the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> some further actions were taken against some of the other Japanese ships.

The four capital Japanese carriers destroyed in the battle were four of the six Japanese carriers that had launched the attack on Pearl Harbor six months earlier. Three American carriers (two were the Yorktown and Enterprise, the other was the Saratoga.) had been delayed in their arrival previously planned for December 6 at Pearl Harbor, thus sparing them in that initial Japanese attack on December 7, 1941.

The U.S. fleet carriers, the Yorktown and Lexington fought in the Battle of the Coral Sea. One Japanese carrier in that battle, the Zuikaku, had its plane and pilot contingent so decimated it couldn't participate in the Battle of Midway, thus helping to form a closer parity with the American carriers. The USS Yorktown and Enterprise, along with USS Hornet, were the American carriers fighting the Japanese in the Battle of Midway.

The Yorktown was taken in tow by USS Vireo until late afternoon on 6 June when Yorktown was struck by two torpedoes from the Japanese sub I-168. There were few casualties as most of the crew had already been evacuated. At 5:00 a.m. on June 7 the Yorktown finally went down.

Breaking the Japanese code, the aggressiveness and gut instincts of the American commanders, particularly Admiral Nimitz, and the pure, raw courage and fight of the American air and ship crews contributed to a major turning point of the Pacific war. The Japanese would never really recover, especially from the loss of so many of their experienced pilots. The American production arsenal was just starting to ramp up into an unstoppable momentum while the Japanese production capability started to wane and continued to do so until the war was over. By the end of the war America had built one hundred aircraft carriers, in addition to many thousands of ships of all kinds.

## Chapter Thirty Five

In June of '42 one of the largest war training maneuvers to date in the United States started taking place in Louisiana. It was commanded by Gen. George Patton. Col. Eisenhower had come to Gen. Patton, asking him for some assignment, but was soon called away to Washington by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General George Marshall.

That summer of 1942, the Second Infantry Division traveled to Louisiana in trucks, pulling their artillery pieces behind, with tanks and other equipment on truck flat beds. They arrived at the train depot in Anancoco, Louisiana, a small town train depot in southwestern Louisiana, just northwest of Ft. Polk. Ft. Polk, a large, old army post was growing even larger and was bustling with the added activity of the burgeoning buildup of the U.S. Army and with being the nearest post for the huge maneuvers getting ready to take place.

The First Cavalry Division was also arriving in Anancoco by train, and this storied old cavalry outfit brought their horses with them. Pop was currently the commander of Company A of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion and still the battalion's motor officer. His battalion was designated to help unload the animals. There were pens that had been built along the tracks to hold all the horses.

Pop, who had ridden and cared for horses since he could walk, was appalled by condition of the poor animals as they were unloaded down ramps, with many terribly skinned up by crashing into the sides of the cars or had been thrown off their hoofs as the train cars were jerked in starting and stopping. Some had broken legs and had to be put down. To Pop it was a throwback to an earlier military era. As the maneuvers began in earnest the horses were soon found to be an impediment to continual, rapid, and capacity carrying movement necessary in modern mechanized tactics.

Pop continued as battalion motor officer in the maneuvers. He kept track of and assigned vehicles to the rest of the company personnel. After the unloading Pop was designated an umpire in the maneuvers. He was assigned a jeep and driver and given field

orders showing what units he was to judge and determine their parameters and status during the expanding activity starting to take place.

There were numerous, full strength divisions from all over the nation participating in the huge training. Over four hundred thousand men and all their equipment got ready to take part in three months of realistic movement and shake down of men, commanders, and their capabilities both physically and mentally. The main area was roughly twenty five percent of the entire land area of the state. The main maneuver area was bordered on the east by Alexandria and south east by Opelousas, Louisiana; the north by Many, the south by Jennings, and Crowley, and the west by the Sabine River. But action took place all the way over to the Mississippi. In roughly the west center of the huge area was Ft. Polk, the epicenter of the continuous mass movement of the U.S. Army, finding its legs. As it did, nations overseas who had created and started this world wide contagion would feel the righteous wrath of a nation of free people, sacrificing themselves for the sake of people the world over. Because it was the best and obvious choice and tough choice at the same time.

First, platoon size movements took place in the first week, then these were combined with company size movements, later moving up to battalion and finally division size maneuvers. At each stage more and more area was used as the movements of the units became broader and the units maneuvering got larger. At first many units kind of stumbled around as their officers tried putting to use their training of land navigation and tried their best to accomplish their mission within the orders given them.

Pop and the other umpires would be assigned to certain units and would determine as the units moved against each other or in conjunction to try taking an objective whether a projected artillery barrage caused certain casualties or if suddenly a unit was hit in the flank by an enemy force that the commander hadn't properly guarded against and so on.

Once a week all the umpires would get together to be critiqued and get new orders as the maneuvers grew in complication and unit size and area. Huge swaths Louisiana found men and machines moving on country roads and paths and through the swamps, woods, and across bayous and creeks of the western half of mid-Louisiana. The sparse population heard trucks, tanks, and jeeps growling at all hours of the day and night. Radio traffic sizzled throughout the land, connecting commanders and their commands.

General Patton, found that certain equipment that was suppose to arrive wasn't there. Repeated calls to Army headquarters back east came to nothing. Finally Patton, one of the richest officers in the U.S. Army, ordered everything needed from Sears & Robuck Catalogue, paying for everything out of his own pocket.

Tents would be set up for a day or so as some command center or to shelter exhausted men only to be moved again to another location and then another.

But as the weeks went on, as the summer heat, and thick, moisture laden air wore on men and equipment, the men and equipment started acting together in better and better concert as the seriousness of the training never left the men or their commanders. War was happening overseas right then far across the Atlantic in terrible agony in the Soviet Union and across the Pacific as Americans, Britons, Chinese, and native peoples in South East Asia suffered horribly at the hands of the Japanese.

One evening, just at dark, as Pop and his driver were just crossing a small wooden bridge over a small river in the thick woods of Louisiana, his driver was going a little too fast and a little too much on the right side, causing part of the weak bridge edge to crumble and

give way; flipping the jeep over further into the river, throwing Pop and his driver out into the river itself, thankfully instead of under the jeep, now upside down in the river bottom. All their gear, sleeping bags and clothes were soaked, but being young and energetic, they picked everything up, carried it all up on the bank and spent the night there.

Pop wasn't sure if this instance started it but Sgt. Barryhill, his jeep driver, got one of their company artists to draw on Pop's jeep a hat with a snake coming out of it holding a doctor's medical bag in its mouth. Pop's nickname became "Snake Doc". It stayed with him during the war.

The Louisiana Maneuvers lasted three months, preparing thousands of soldiers, officers and commanders for the brutal fight against one of the best armies of the world on the fields of Europe.

Arriving back in Ft. Sam Houston at the beginning of Fall 1942, the training continued unrelenting. One day Pop and a platoon were picked to be the subject of an Armed Forces radio show widely broadcast as a typical Army platoon in training for battle. Burgess Meredith, a movie and radio star, and Army soldier, later to be a prominent character actor starring in many famous movies alongside famous stars, was the commentator describing in detail on the radio to listeners nationwide what Pop and his platoon were doing all one afternoon as they went through intense training exercises, maneuvering and firing their weapons in an assault on the enemy.

The main training ground at Ft. Sam took place north of San Antonio at Camp Bullis, where Pop had trained when a cadet student the summer after his junior year at AMC. The training then was serious, now it was deadly serious. Camp Bullis was hot, dry, and dusty, with the beautiful Guadalupe River running along its north edge. But there was little time for swimming in its clear, azure waters or even thinking about it. They got in it when building steel treadaway and Bailey bridges across it. The treadaway bridges had floating pontoons that had to be anchored in the river bottom then steel grid roadways were set on top to form the two lane road. Bailey bridges, a British invention, were pieced together like giant erector set pieces, pushed out over the river span with more fitted and pushed out until the river was spanned.



Picture of Pop and his fellow 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. soldiers lined up in a Camp Bullis field for training. Pop is the officer on the left with his hands clasped behind his back facing the men.

Pop and his fellow officers of the Second Engineer Battalion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division trained themselves and their men in various

combat engineer techniques used in war in support of infantry. They continued training in explosives, mines, and unit maneuvers, and training the men coming into the Army. The regular Army officers and non commissioned officers were the structure around which the rapidly expanding Army was forming. A&M graduates were similar in that they had four years of military discipline and training.

Soon Ft. Sam Houston, San Antonio, Camp Bullis, and Texas were to be left behind. The Japanese had attacked America itself in the Aleutian Islands of Alaska. Pop and the Second Division were going north.

The Japanese attacked and landed in the Aleutian Islands of Alaska. Several sharp, deadly actions were launched to repel them. The American casualties in one unit were some of the heaviest in the war of any American unit.



## Chapter Thirty Six

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In April 1942, Filip Muller from Slovakia was sent to the little Polish town of Oswieczim, which the Nazis called Auschwitz, in one of the earliest transports there. On a Sunday in May, what was supposed to be a rest day, found him at attention as Vacek, the Block Clerk, a former professional criminal and ruler supreme over the 500 prisoners lined up in rows of ten in an enclosed yard, shouted, “ ‘Shun! Caps on! Caps off! Get a move on!’ ” Vacek wanted to hear the sharp slap of against the thighs of the men as one whip crack when each man whipped their cap off their shaved head. The order had been repeated already dozens of times.

A father of four was the first victim. His right hand was paralyzed. Vacek flung himself on the disabled man, dragging him across the yard to face him against a wall. The next victim was a deaf tailor who had been a fraction of a second late, who had to see what the others were doing and try to copy them as fast as he could. Not satisfied with only two victims, Vacek looked for any victim, a nose too long, spectacles with thick lenses, anything. Each of the 500 left standing shuddered. They could be next.

Soon thirty men were lined up against the wall in rows of five and made to jump, crawl, lie down, all at the double. Blows rained down on each in turn from Vacek and his block orderlies, all thirty men exerted to complete exhaustion. After twenty minutes some couldn't rise anymore and were beaten to death. Those remaining tried keeping up with the shouted commands but soon couldn't to Vacek's satisfaction and were also were beaten to death.

Vacek's bloodthirsty gaze surveyed satisfactorily his harvest of death. The dead bodies were collected and laid on their backs. Schlage, the SS-Rottenfuhrer-Lance Corporal on duty behaved as though the gory proceedings didn't concern him. He had watched from the top of the stairs to make sure his block clerk carried out his gruesome duties to the fullest.

A muttering was then heard growing louder and louder. “This is intolerable! These are innocent people who are being put to death!”

Filip identified the man as a man from his home town, an excellent lawyer, an authority on Jewish writing, a respected citizen who had always tried to help those less fortunate. The

man had been muttering that the officials in charge must not know that prisoners were murdering other prisoners. Filip realized the man hadn't woken up to the fact that here, no laws of humanity existed.

Vacek came down the stairs barking commands as the prisoners fell in and were counted, both living and dead. Vacek's command "Hats off!" Was followed with great, desperate precision. Vacek gave his report to the block senior who in turn reported to Rottenfuher Schlage who had descended the stairs with dignity.

Amid whispers the lawyer pushed his way through the ranks and stopped in front of Schlage, "Herr Kommandant, as a human being and lawyer I wish to report that the block clerk," pointing at Vacek – has arbitrarily killed several innocent people....I am convinced that the block clerk has killed these prisoners without the knowledge of either his immediate superiors or the authorities. We have been sent here to work and not be killed. Monsignor Tiso, President of Slovakia, has himself vouched for our safety. I would therefore request you to have this morning's events investigated and to see that the guilty are duly punished."

There was a moment of stunned silence as Schlage for a time stood rooted to the spot until his face grew livid with rage. "Did you hear what this fucking Jew has been blathering about?" Schlage ordered Vacek to "...give him what he deserves!"

Vacek with his truncheon began immediately to beat the lawyer until the man fell dead. The rest were to then get some tea, but Vacek ordered it poured into the drain. The desperately thirsty men watched the liquid flow away.

Then all were ordered to check for lice. Lice not only carried typhus, but if one were found after delousing, it meant the prisoner had disobeyed a direct Nazi order and would be severely punished, even risk death.

Leaders of work parties were expected to return in late evening with less people than they went out with in the morning. Those prisoners returning were bloodied and bruised.

The black wall was where a lot of prisoners were killed with a single bullet to the back of the head while that yard also had an active gallows.

Much later Filip learned Vacek was among the first of a group of professional criminals trained at Sachsenhausen concentration camp, SS appointed Funktionshaftling-prisoners entrusted with special duties and given special privileges, clothing, and rations.

Filip Muller was kept alive by sheer luck in being transferred to the cremation ovens at Auschwitz, becoming part of the work detail that burned the bodies of the camp's hundreds of thousands of murder victims. He worked in biting smoke through which the fires of the huge ovens penetrated and the stench of damp bodies piled up as he and others undressed them, while SS officer Stark shouted at them to go faster. Fishl, the prisoner foreman went through, prizing open each body's mouth with an iron bar, tearing out any gold teeth and throwing them into a bucket. There was a whole procedure for putting the bodies in the ovens while the ovens continued burning fiercely.

Filip recoiled with horror when he recognized the face of Yolanda Weis, a classmate of his from school. He also recognized another dead body as a neighbor from his home town of Sered. Some of the bodies had military uniforms of Soviet POWs. All were stripped of anything of value to the Reich and pushed into the fiery caldrons to become smoke up the chimneys. Many of the bodies were still warm from life. Muller couldn't conceive at the time how so many people could be murdered so quickly.

He rushed to fulfill the grisly commands shouted at him with all his energy like a robot, determined not to give in as some prisoners did and make himself useful so to live. He

recognized three fellow prisoners among the bodies. They were still breathing but had given up.

Prisoners also went into the “death strip” along the high tension wire fence surrounding the camp. Here they ended their suffering with electrocution or by a burst of machine gun fire. The prisoners called this “Going to the wire”.

He also was part of prisoners who buried bodies in large pits outside the camp under the shouts of SS officers. This was done when the ovens didn't burn bodies fast enough. It was overseen by Hauptsturmführer Hans Aumeier in charge of the main camp, and the chief of the Gestapo's political department SS-Untersturmführer Max Grabner.

Back at camp they were rammed into a small underground room with no light and little air where they passed out exhausted. In what they took to be morning they heard prisoners taken from cells right next to them put up against the black wall and shot, sure they would be next. They heard desperate wailing and lamentation and God's name being invoked. Their room was skipped and the next one nearest them was emptied of prisoners. They counted a hundred shots.

Later Filip became a member of the Sonderkommandos, a roving work gang of prisoners. The SS soon found it was much more efficient if the condemned took off their clothes before being murdered, saving having to undress dead bodies afterward.

The people arriving would have been crammed into cattle rail cars for days on end, no food or water. Forced to relieve themselves where they stood, the lone bucket for the whole car quickly filled and sloshed over. Mothers tried to calm and care for their children and babies under horrific conditions. They came from all over the Reich. In most cars some people died in transit with the rest having to travel next to them. Upon arrival at night the car doors would be slammed open with harsh lights glaring into the people's eyes and SS men shouting and holding dogs straining at leashes barking as they stumbled down the ramp onto the ground.

Confusion reigned until they were ordered to walk up to an officer in charge who told who to go where, the mothers, children, and old to his right, the able bodied to his left. Those directed to the left were sent to one of a hundred satellite camps around Auschwitz-Birkenau where this slave labor worked for German companies producing equipment and goods for the German war effort and the German people. Companies with well known names today, Siemens, Krupp, Chase bank, I.G. Farben, Deutsche Bank, Bayer, many others.

They might have been told upon boarding the train at origin that they were going to work camps where they were sorely needed and could live with their families in safety and comfort. Any lie to get them to go as peacefully and efficiently as possible.

Bewildered they continued walking along with others to where they were told to go. If they arrived during the day the sunlight was blinding after being in the dark, jam packed car. If they hesitated they were beaten. Parents chosen for work would see their children in other lines trying to join them, only to be whipped back into line. All clinging to the hope that somehow the people who now had complete control of their lives would treat them as they would treat people, with some humanity. Surely, they could get through this. Somewhere there was hope to keep them going.

A few knew the truth, but most clung to the hope that the stories weren't true, at least not for them. A large portion never heard of the stories of people being exterminated. Mothers clung to their babies and children, desperate to keep them safe and alive, hoping to find

water, milk, and food for them after days of being parched, hungry, exhausted and fowled with their own waste.

The station would look normal, with a clock tower, flowers, and sometimes a band playing familiar melodies.

The people were told to go into a changing room and take off all their clothes in order to take a shower. They needed to do this before they were fed. Once there, most started doing this, those who hesitated would be shouted at or sometimes beaten if it went on too long. Then they were shepherded into a room with shower heads and when the last were in, the doors slammed and sealed. On the roof above SS men with gas masks would pour in the amethyst green crystals which instantly turned into poison hydrogen cyanide gas that then poured through the shower vents and out over the people, slowly killing them. Screaming, gasping, and beating on the doors were all to no avail. Then the SS doctor on duty, Dr. Rhode, looked through a peep hole in the door to make sure all were dead.

Some people from various Jewish ghettos of Sosnovits and Bedzin knew their fate as they lived not far from Auschwitz. Others from further away didn't know such as the large Lodz Ghetto, thinking they were being sent to work camps where they were told they were essential to the German nation and would be well treated. In the ghettos each Jewish mother tried desperately to keep some semblance of normalcy for their families in keeping them fed, clothed and a place to sleep. It was just barely possible in most cases.

The ghettos turned out to be just holding centers for the Jews until the Nazis could allocate sending them to death camps and possible selection there for slave labor of value to the Reich until they were starved or worked to death. With each day the conditions became more terrible with control of their situation taken from them until they were packed onto cattle cars and carried to the death camps.

The Warsaw Ghetto was the largest in Europe, established by the Nazis between October and November 16, 1940. It contained over 440,000 imprisoned Jews, who had been forced there from other parts of Warsaw, and from refugees streaming in from the initial attacks on Poland.

They were walled off totally from the rest of Warsaw and the world on November 16, 1940 and all crowded into 1.3 sq. mi at an average of 9.2 persons to a room. Average daily rations in 1941 were 184 calories, reduced to 177 per person in August. Gentile Poles in Warsaw had 699 calories while Germans had 2,613. The only way some survived was by smuggling.

Thousands of Polish Jews plus Romani people were brought into the Warsaw Ghetto from the smaller towns, but starvation, executions, and rampant disease kept the population fairly constant. Anyone caught escaping was shot on sight. Battalion 61 of the German police would hold victory parties when a large number of desperate prisoners were shot at the ghetto fence. The Soviets had carved up Poland between the Nazis and themselves. The Soviets didn't care about this horror as their own country had a history of terrible treatment of the Jewish people native to their lands.

In the summer of 1942 254,000 Ghetto residents were sent to the Treblinka extermination camp during Grobaktion Warshau under the guise of "resettlement in the east". Adam Czerniakow, head of the Jewish council that internally governed the Ghetto, had tried to make people useful to the Germans in work in an effort to save as many lives as possible. That July he was ordered to increase the deportations. The initial deportations had mostly been men, but now they were to increasingly include women and children. He committed suicide.



Warsaw Ghetto wall and footbridge over Chłodna Street in 1942, a major thoroughfare through Warsaw.



A child dying on the street in the Warsaw Ghetto, September 19, 1941



Warsaw Ghetto, 1941, intersection of Ksawery Lubecki and Gęsia street

Some Jews had hidden in caves dug into hill sides outside of town coming out only at night until their food ran out and the constant crying of their hungry and feverish children gave them away. Without questioning or trial they were brought to Birkenau, told to undress and shot against a wall. One young mother tried to answer her daughter's questions as she undressed both of them. "Mother, why are we undressing?"

"Because we must."

"Is the doctor going to examine me, and make me well again?"

"He will my darling, soon you will be well, and then we'll all be happy." She struggled to continue talking normally to her daughter, barely maintaining her pose, aging 50 years in a few minutes, until an SS man named Voss came to take her to the wall while she hugged her child close.

Many young mothers begged the SS executioners to kill them before they killed their children. This young mother stood in the blood of others before her as she twisted and turned while Voss, the executioner, tried getting a good spot on the child to aim his gun. Three shots and the little girl was dead. Feeling her daughter's blood flowing down on her the mother lost it, flinging her girl's body right into Voss' face. He stood blood splattered and stunned with his pistol pointed at the mother for some moments. SS Shurmann Kurschuss grasped his chief's arm. "Carry on, Rottenfuhrer!" Stammered Voss, "I've had enough for today." leaving the mother to be shot by Kurschuss. Fifty naked bodies lay in front of the wall. The few who feebly moved their blood stained heads because the bullet had missed killing them by a fraction were finished off by another bullet to their head or eye.

Another day Filip stood in a large yard with a sign as a group of about a thousand men,

women and children arrived at a large room down a wide ramp. Other Sonderkommandos also stood with signs with different letters on them.

On a box stood SS officer Schwarzhuber, who introduced an official from the foreign ministry. It was all a sham. The official was Obersturmführer 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Hossler, one of the SS men dressed to look official. "Ladies and gentlemen, I have been instructed by the Foreign Ministry to organize your journey to Switzerland...We have brought you here because the Swiss authorities insist that each of you must be disinfected before you cross the frontier." He went on to say all would be given a certificate of disinfection they must show at the border, and when they had finished their showers they were to line up at one of the signs according to their last name. This was to make the victims placid and cooperative so the murdering would be carried out with the most efficiency. All then left for the underground changing room.

A beautiful lady who was a dancer distracted two SS men with the provocative way she undressed, Quackernack and Schillinger; and in a lighting flash hit Quackernack in the forehead with her shoe heel, grabbed his pistol and shot Schillinger in the stomach. She disappeared into the crowd. Then SS were stunned and ran out, only to run back to pull Schillinger outside and close the doors.

Filip and the Sonderkommandos were left in the dark with all the people. One man near them asked where they came from, "The death factory" one of Filip's companions answered. The man was beside himself.

"...We have valid permits for Paraguay...We paid the Gestapo a great deal of money to get our exit permits."

The door was suddenly flung open with blinding searchlights glaring, and to his tremendous relief Filip Muller and his group were ordered out and back to the cremation room, then machine guns rattled and a terrible blood bath ensued. They found out later Schillinger died, which pleased them very much as he was one of the most sadistic SS men.

Sometimes mentally ill people were shot in the crematorium with small bore pistols to the back of the head. Most calmly accepted death because they didn't know what was happening.

Also large numbers of Polish soldiers, Soviet prisoners, and Polish civilians transferred from prisons were executed in this way. Many were newly arrested, well nourished and in their prime. Most bore bruises from torture and beatings. Once in the crematorium, the heavy metal gate was shut behind them and there was no escape. They could hear the muffled shots and thud of the bodies falling in the execution room. The blood was to be hosed off the floor in the room after each group of five, but often those about to be shot against the wall had to stand in the blood of those shot right before them. They turned to God and prayed to Him.

Filip found out from a member from Slovakia of a crew building a new chimney in the crematoriums that Filip's father had recently arrived on a transport. Filip bribed the foreman of the crew to get his father on it, and was able to visit him a few times. His father was overjoyed to see him, extorting with pride how he felt sure he would find Filip in the camp orchestra as he was a really good violin player. That this would keep Filip from the worst. Filip didn't tell him that his main job was as a stoker in the ovens burning human bodies of recently murdered victims. In the few times he was able to see his father, despite the help he was able to give him, Filip realized the man was hardly able to keep on his feet. That he had typhus. A few days later his father's body was brought to the crematorium and fellow

prisoners placed it on the trolley to be burned in the ovens. A fellow prisoner recited the Kaddish, the Hebrew prayer for those recently just passed on. Filip thought no human feelings were left in him, but as his father's body was consumed by the flames, his soul mourned in pain and grief, as the traditional prayer gave him solace in this time of sorrow.



## Chapter Thirty Seven

Between July 22 and September 12, 1942 the German authorities deported or murdered around 300,000 Jews in the Warsaw ghetto. 265,000 were deported to the Treblinka killing center and 11,580 to forced labor camps. The German and their auxiliaries murdered more than 10,000 Jews in the ghetto during the deportation operations.

Only 35,000 Jews were given permission to remain in the ghetto with at least an additional 20,000 in hiding. In response Jewish underground organizations created two groups, the Jewish Combat Organization with its Polish initials of ZOB for *Zydowska Organizacja Bojowa*, of 200 members, and the right-wing Zionists Jewish Military Union (*Zydowski Zwiazek Wojskowy:ZZW*).

In October 1942, SS Chief Heinrich Himmler ordered the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto and the deportation of its able bodied residents to forced labor camps in the Lublin District. In carrying out this order, German SS and police units tried to resume the mass deportations on January 18, 1943. A group of Jewish fighters, armed with pistols, infiltrated a column of Jews being forced to the transfer point. At a prearranged signal, they broke ranks and fought the German escorts. Most of the Jewish fighters died in the battle. The attack disoriented the Germans enough to allow the Jews in the column to flee. After seizing around 6,000 more Jews to be deported, the Germans suspended further deportations on January 21, 1943.

Encouraged by what they believe may have halted further deportations, remaining members of the ghetto began to construct subterranean bunkers and shelters in preparation for an uprising should the Germans attempt to deport all the remaining Jews.



An underground bunker, built by Jews in Warsaw in preparation for anti-Nazi resistance. This photograph shows cooking facilities in a bunker. Jews hid in bunkers while the Germans systematically destroyed the ghetto during the uprising. Warsaw, Poland, April 19–May 16, 1943.

*National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD*

The police and SS auxiliary forces intended to begin the operations to liquidate the Warsaw ghetto on April 19, 1943, the eve of Passover. They were planning to complete the deportation action within three days, but were ambushed by Jewish insurgents firing and tossing Molotov cocktails and hand grenades from alleyways, sewers, and windows when the German forces entered the ghetto. The Germans suffered 59 casualties and their advance bogged down. Two of their combat vehicles (an armed conversion of a French-made Lorraine 37L light armored vehicle and an armored car) were set on fire by the insurgents's petrol bombs. Following this failure to contain the revolt, von Sammern-Frankenegg's SS and police commander was replaced by SS-Brigadeführer Jürgen Stroop, who rejected von Sammern-Frankenegg's proposal to call in bomber aircraft from Kraków and proceeded to lead a better-organized and reinforced ground attack.

The longest-lasting defense of a position took place around the ŻZW stronghold at Muranowski Square, where the ŻZW chief leader, Dawid Moryc Apfelbaum, was killed in combat. On the afternoon of 19 April, a symbolic event took place when two boys climbed up on the roof of a building on the square and raised two flags, the red-and-white Polish flag and the blue-and-white banner of the ŻZW. These flags remained there, highly visible from the Warsaw streets, for four days. After the war, Stroop recalled:

The matter of the flags was of great political and moral importance. It reminded hundreds of thousands of the Polish cause, it excited them and unified the population of the General Government, but especially Jews and Poles. The Reichsfuehrer Heinrich Himmler called and bellowed into the phone: "Stroop, you must at all costs bring down those two flags!"

During this fight on 22 April, SS officer Hans Dehmke was killed when gunfire detonated a hand grenade he was holding. When Stroop's ultimatum to surrender was rejected by the defenders, his forces resorted to systematically burning houses block by block using flamethrowers and fire bottles, and blowing up basements and sewers. "We were beaten by the flames, not the Germans," One resistance commander recalled, "The sea of flames flooded houses and courtyards. ... There was no air, only black, choking smoke and heavy burning heat radiating from the red-hot walls, from the glowing stone stairs." The "bunker wars" lasted an entire month, during which German progress was slowed.

While the battle continued inside the ghetto, Polish resistance groups AK and GL engaged the Germans between 19 and 23 April at six different locations outside the ghetto walls, firing at German sentries and positions. In one attack, three units of the AK under the command of Captain Józef Pszenny ("Chwacki") joined up in a failed attempt to breach the ghetto walls with explosives. Eventually, the ŻZW lost all of its commanders and, on 29 April, the remaining fighters from the organization escaped the ghetto through the Muranowski tunnel and relocated to the Michalin forest. This event marked the end of significant fighting. The Germans killed the ZOB commander Anielewicz in the ZOB command bunker on 18 Miła Street, which was captured on May 8.

Stroop expressed confusion that the Ghetto's Jewish combatants, whom he had been taught to view as *Untermenschen* (sub-human, used to describe Jews and Slavs) had fought so effectively against his men. He later remarked:

"... The Jews surprised me and my officers, and even Dr. Hahn, with their determination in battle. And believe me, as veterans of World War I and SS members, we knew what determination in battle was all about. The tenacity of your Warsaw Jews took us completely by surprise. That's the real reason the *Großaktion* lasted as long as it did."



Jewish people being led for deportation in the Warsaw Ghetto during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The little girl appears to be looking up at the German soldier's rifle.



The original German caption reads: "Forcibly pulled out of dug-outs". These were the dug-outs within the Warsaw ghetto.



Jews being deported, forced onto trains in Warsaw 1943



Stroop report original caption, "Destruction of a Housing Block"



Stroop report, "A patrol". SS men on Nowolipie street.



SS General Stroop, second from the left, looking at the burning of housing blocks in the Ghetto. He was captured by the Americans in Germany, convicted of war crimes in two different trials (U.S. military and Polish) and hanged on the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 1952 at 7 o'clock in the evening along with the Ghetto SS administrator, Franz Konrad. The Americans

sentenced him to be hanged for ordering the shooting of nine American airmen shot down in his district, but then turned him over to Polish authorities to be tried there for his crimes.



Two trained Ukrainian shooters from the Trawniki concentration camp looking at Jews killed in the uprising.

On the first day of the Warsaw ghetto uprising Stroop took over command of the German forces, replacing Dr Ferdinand von Sammern-Frankennegg, and he produced a detailed report of the operation to destroy the Jewish residential quarter. Stroop recorded his deeds in a boastful seventy-five page report bound together in black pebble leather and including copies of all daily communiqués sent to Kruger – SS Police Leader East, as well as photographs with captions in Gothic script.

Former SS- *Hauptsturmführer*(Captain) Georg Michalsen, who was a member of Odilo Globocnik's *Aktion Reinhardt* staff, and had been sent to Warsaw to oversee the transfer of enterprises to the Lublin district, recalled his short time in Warsaw, serving under Stroop:

*"The witness Max Jesuiter stated that Stroop had an outspoken hatred against Jews. If it had gone according to Stroop, not one train with Jews would have left Warsaw, but Stroop would have liquidated all Jews right there."*

Michalsen – "I consider this description as valid. I also was under the impression that Stroop was negatively disposed towards a transfer of Jews and under the circumstances only bent to higher pressures.

I also stated that it never happened before Stroop's time that houses were burnt down. But as soon as Stroop arrived, and that was even on his first day, houses were set on fire. I have witnessed myself how people jumped from burning houses. Most probably they died."

After the Ghetto Uprising, SS-*Obergruppenführer* Friedrich- Wilhelm Kruger awarded an Iron Cross 1<sup>st</sup> Class to Stroop on 18 June 1943 for the action at a gala reception in Warsaw's Lazienki Park.



Photo from SS General Jurgen Stroop's report shows a column of Jews being marched out for deportation to the death camp while the ghetto burns around them during April-May 1943. His seventy five page report of the suppression of the uprising was titled, "The Jewish Quarter of Warsaw is No More!"

Ben Meed, who had escaped early in the war to Soviet occupied eastern Poland had come back to the Warsaw ghetto to be with his family. He had been assigned to a work detail outside the ghetto and helped smuggle people out of it, including Valdka Peltel who later became his wife. He went into hiding outside the ghetto, posing as a non-Jewish Pole. During the uprising he worked with other members of the underground to rescue ghetto fighters, bringing them out through the sewers and hiding them on the "Aryan" side of Warsaw. He witnessed the burning of the Warsaw ghetto, "The entire sky of Warsaw was red. Completely red." He escaped from Warsaw posing as a non-Jew. After liberation he was reunited with his father, mother, and younger sister.

Stroop reported he had captured 56,065 Jews and destroyed 631 bunkers, and killed up to 7,000 Jews during the uprising. Another 7,000 Warsaw Jews were deported to Treblinka where almost all were killed with gas upon arrival.

To symbolize the German victory, Stroop ordered the destruction of the Great Synagogue on Tlomacki Street on May 16, 1943.

Stroop lived through the war, and recalled later in an interview, before his war crime trials; "What a marvelous sight it was. A fantastic piece of theater. My staff and I stood at a distance. I held the electrical device which would detonate all the charges simultaneously. Jesuiter called for silence. I glanced over at my brave officers and men, tired and dirty, silhouetted against the glow of the burning buildings. After prolonging the suspense for a moment, I shouted: *Heil Hitler* and pressed the button."





The **Great Synagogue of Warsaw** ([Polish: Wielka Synagoga w Warszawie](#)) was one of the grandest buildings constructed in [Poland](#) in the 19th century completed in 1878, and at the time of its opening was the largest synagogue in the world. It was located on [Tlomackie](#) street in [Warsaw](#).

On 10 May, a Bundist member of the Polish government in exile, Szmul Zygielbojm, committed suicide in London to protest the lack of reaction from the Allied governments. In his farewell note, he wrote:

“I cannot continue to live and to be silent while the remnants of Polish Jewry, whose representative I am, are being murdered. My comrades in the Warsaw Ghetto fell with arms in their hands in the last heroic battle... By my death, I wish to give expression to my most profound protest against the inaction in which the world watches and permits the destruction of the Jewish people.”

The Warsaw ghetto uprising was the largest, symbolically most important Jewish uprising, and the first urban uprising, in German-occupied Europe. The resistance in Warsaw was followed by other uprisings in ghettos such as Bialystok and Minsk, and killing centers in Treblinka and Sobibor.

During the war there were approximately 30,000 Jewish Partisans, some escaped from the camps, most escaped from the ghettos, or having avoided capture in the initial deadly sweeps for Jews. These Partisans lived in the woods in Western Russia, in Poland and other countries. They would attack German soldiers and installations, stealing valuable ammunition and weapons. They struggled to find enough food for themselves, and would be hanged or shot upon capture. They were often tortured for any information the Nazis could drag from them.

Except for possibly targeting specifically the trains and tracks used to transport people to the slave labor camps and killing centers, which were much further than normal bombing runs over Germany, the Allies were working round the clock and sacrificing many thousands of lives to stop this very destruction. The German military forces in 1943 were still extremely formidable and deadly. Daily the Allies were sacrificing many lives to fly into the heart of Germany to bomb Germany's capacity to wage war and simultaneously fighting the Axis powers on many world wide fronts, besides preparing for the massive invasion of mainland Europe.



## Chapter Thirty Eight

The Second Division and all its equipment was immediately moved to a new post in Wisconsin called Camp McCoy. It had been built in a very short time to house the Second Division. They moved up there soon after they got back to Ft. Sam from the Louisiana Maneuvers. Pop and a small group were picked to go before the main group to determine who was put where at McCoy and to start planning their training.

However, before leaving Ft. Sam, Dad, along with the other officers, were assigned the responsibility of making sure the equipment and supplies each unit used while in training at Ft. Sam were accounted for before the unit could take off to Camp McCoy. The company Pop was assigned, he and some sergeants scrambled around trying to account for all the equipment and weapons, but he also had orders to report to the camp in Wisconsin before the rest of the Division. They did their best and he signed off on all the forms.

Before the Division started off for the cold of Wisconsin, Pop applied for transfer to the Army Air Corps. The Army had a program where an officer could transfer in grade to the Air Corps, meaning he could keep his rank in the Air Corps when he transferred. He thought it would be exciting and even fun to pilot a plane in the service.

However, Col. Warren turned down the two requests Pop put in. He wasn't about to lose a trained engineer officer whom he'd made assistant Division engineer, where Pop coordinated orders from Division headquarters and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion's duties for the Division's infantry regiments and other units. That position called for the rank of captain to fill it. Pop had been promoted.

Fall was coming on and higher command started them training for cold weather operations. Wisconsin, right in the northern, middle of the U.S., was right near major railroad connections. If the Japanese, currently seeking to exploit their invasion of America's far northern reaches made serious inroads from their current few Aleutian Islands occupation, then the Second Division was poised to be moved by rail rapidly to the west coast and then up to where they would confront the Japanese.

If there was a threat to the east coast that needed immediate attention, then the Second could also be moved east to confront that threat.

A lot of the young men, boys still in many ways, were from the south, so Wisconsin and winter training was an adventure. They were issued winter clothing and sleeping bags stuffed with the down of the Eider duck. They'd keep a sleeping person warm down to forty degrees below zero. The soldiers mostly were outside, moving during the day, making camp at night. Putting up tents and sleeping in sub-zero temperatures. The snow was often four feet deep.

This was war, and the whole area for many miles around was used for training. This was an infantry division, an old, storied fighting division, "Second to None". Pop and the Second Engineer Battalion would support the thousands of infantry soldiers in their assaults and unit maneuver training. They'd build Bailey, treadaway, and pontoon bridges across streams and rivers that the infantry would then cross in force. The Bailey bridge was invented by a British man. It was designed to be assembled in parts and by hand. Layers of siding bracing could be added that would increase the strength until the bridge could support the heaviest tank and trucks. As parts were built on one side of the river, more would be added to it and the parts already assembled would be pushed out over the river, until more were added and pushed out until the river would be breached and the flooring added. These would be used extensively in Europe.

They would often be out in wooded areas with snow four feet deep. They maneuvered in various units strength north into the Ottawa National Forest. Once he and Freddie Valentino, both captains, and Capt. Valentino's driver were way up north of Camp McCoy, reconnoitering an area for troop movement. It was windy and bitterly cold. They literally felt as if they were freezing to death. They came upon what looked to be a small school house out in the middle of this vast forest wilderness. Smoke was coming out of the small smoke stack. A big draft horse and sleigh waited beside the building under a kind of frame roof. The horse had a blanket draped over it. They stopped and rushed inside.

The teacher was shocked and the kids were overjoyed to see two Army officers and a soldier right there in their class! Pop asked if they could warm up, and the teacher agreed, so Pop and his companions quickly crowded around the wood burning stove at the back of the class room. It felt like heaven. The children crowded around them asking questions, wanting to see their helmets and looking at their sidearms. They stayed about thirty minutes and then got on with their mission.

The cold played hell with their trucks and jeeps. All had six volt batteries. They often didn't start at all. The six volts were replaced with twelve volt and some vehicles rewired to accommodate them. After that things went a lot better.



Photo of Pop in helmet and combat uniform while talking to a soldier identified as Lt. Ising, while in Wisconsin.

In mid winter Freddy Valentino bought a brand new Buick there in Wisconsin. Freddy had been born in Italy and come over as a seven year old boy to the United States with his family, but they were all full fledged Texans now.

Freddy got a week's pass to take the car home to Texas and asked Pop to go with him. They drove all day and wound up in Waterloo, Iowa late in the evening. It was freezing cold and they had to get gas before they could go further. It was war and strict rationing was in effect all over. The only gas station was closed for the night and spending it in a frozen car looked like their lot. But they were in luck. They spied an all night diner, the only thing open in the small crossroads town. So they drank coffee, visited, and waited in the warmth until the next morning when they could gas up and continue their trip to Texas. They stayed and visited for that week and were soon back in Wisconsin and training.

The Engineer Battalion practiced laying anti-personnel and tank mines and then clearing roads and areas of them. They practiced detecting and removing various types of German mines supplied by the Army.

They continued practicing building bridges across rivers and streams. They practiced until they could complete them in hours instead of most of the day. This was crucial as infantry would then assault across the bridges and practice assaulting an area, spreading out in units and practicing with artillery support and armor support units of the division.

An Army division was a self contained major unit of maneuver, containing as much as 25,000 men, with an engineer battalion, an artillery regiment composed of three battalions of artillery plus a head quarters battalion; three regiments of infantry with three battalions each of infantry, a motor pool, a tank battalion, a medical battalion, and other support units. The engineer battalion was responsible for building bridges, blowing up bridges, clearing mine fields, defusing bombs and enemy charges, supplying potable water to the whole division and keeping roads passable for the division's movements.

Pop was the assistant to Col. Warren, the Second Engineer Battalion commander and at Division level was the assistant Division Engineer. The Engineer Battalion executive officer, or second in command, was Lt. Col. Snetzer. Pop sat in on all the meetings at division level. Many of the meetings were about setting up training regimens where the Second Engineer Battalion would be supporting the infantry regiments in their assault trainings. Others were where the engineers would hold training sessions for the various infantry units in mine detection and removal. This was deadly serious work for all parties; equally for the engineers as they would be the ones most often detecting and removing the mines and also the infantry as they would encounter such enemy devices planted to kill them.

Infrequently social events would be held for the soldiers. At one held in a town near Camp McCoy the soldiers held a march down main street. That evening a dance was held for the men. A pretty brunet had noticed Freddy Valentino during the march. At the dance she walked over. "Don't you dance Lieutenant?" Freddy told her he didn't as he was a Catholic. So Lou sat down and started talking to him. He liked her, and she liked him. They struck up a relationship.

So Freddy and Pop would take their passes for Freddy to see Lou and Pop to tag along and see the town.

## Chapter Thirty Nine

After the capture of Kiev by the Germans, the Red Army no longer outnumbered the Germans and there were no more trained reserves directly available to the Soviets. The German Army had a costly delay due to supply problems, but mainly bickering on tactics at the German High Command with Hitler. The operation on the Moscow front finally started moving on September 20, 1941.

To defend Moscow, Stalin could field 800,000 men in 83 divisions, but no more than 25 divisions were fully effective. Operation Typhoon, the Nazi drive to Moscow, began on 30 September 1941. In front of Army Group Center was a series of three elaborate defense lines around Moscow. Their delay would cost the Germans dearly as the Soviets had been given time to build strong defenses around Moscow and scramble to bring in reinforcements.

Russian peasants began fleeing ahead of the advancing German units, burning their harvested crops, driving their cattle away, and destroying buildings in their villages as ordered as part of a scorched-earth policy designed to deny the Nazi war machine of needed supplies and foodstuffs.

There was no consideration at all given to the effect this devastation of homes and food supplies would have on the Soviet population.

However, starting on October 8, three weeks of steady rain interrupted by snow turned the unpaved road network into almost impassable mud tracks. Only 7% of the Soviet roads were paved enough to bear the load of trucks, tanks, and draft horses. By December 4, leading units of the Germans were just 19 miles from Red Square. That night the temperature plummeted, halting the German advance. When winter hit with a freezing vengeance both armies suffered in not being prepared as they needed to be, especially the Germans. This and the earlier delay enabled the Soviet forces to better prepare for the Nazi Moscow attack.

Also, importantly, Stalin's spy in Tokyo found that the Japanese had no further designs on attacking the Soviet Union. This freed up 30 divisions of well trained and equipped troops to hastily move on the Trans Siberian Railroad to move to the Moscow area and participate in the coming massive Soviet army counter attack soon to take place to drive the Nazis away from Moscow. A total of one half million Soviet soldiers arrived on the Moscow front to participate in its defense and this counterattack.

Due to being pushed away from Moscow Hitler sacked his Army commander Field Marshal Walther von Brauchitsch and 35 other officers and appointed himself as Germany's supreme military commander. (During the course of the war Hitler had 84 of his generals executed, many because of the July 20, 1944 bomb assassination attempt on him.) During this time in the approach to Moscow he had three of his most able generals on the eastern front sacked, generals Halder, Guderian, and Manstein. He took over as the position of head

of all the German military, surrounding himself with commanders who would go completely along with all his wishes. The days of a quick victory in the Soviet Union were over.

Though before all this, Hitler's generals had advocated strongly earlier for a continued push to Moscow for all the military and political reasons capturing it would bring. The bickering with Hitler and in the German high command and with earlier supply constraints, delayed this earlier push on Moscow. After they were pushed back from Moscow, Hitler ordered the army to divert to strike toward the Caucasus with its oil and toward more economic targets.

This caused the tactical diversion that also resulted in the Battle of Stalingrad, at the time, not a target of immediate military importance.

The citizens of Leningrad in Army Group North were subjected to heavy bombardment and a siege that would last 872 days and starve more than a million people to death, of whom approximately 400,000 were children below the age of 14. The German-Finnish blockade cut off access to food, fuel and raw materials, and rations reached a low, for the non-working population, of four ounces (five thin slices) of bread and a little watery soup per day. Starving Soviet civilians began to eat their domestic animals, along with hair tonic and Vaseline. Some desperate citizens resorted to cannibalism; Soviet records list 2,000 people arrested for "the use of human meat as food" during the siege, 886 of them during the first winter of 1941–42. The Wehrmacht planned to seal off Leningrad, starve out the population, and then demolish the city.

The German army early on used drugs to enhance their soldier's performance and endurance. A so-called "stimulant decree" issued in April 1940 sent more than 35 million tablets of Pervitin and Isophan (a slightly modified version produced by the Knoll pharmaceutical company) of the pills to the front lines, where they fueled the Nazis' "Blitzkrieg" invasion of France through Belgium, Holland, and then France in attacking through the Ardennes mountains. Even Hitler's generals said the attack through the Ardennes couldn't be adequately and quickly enough launched through the Ardennes because of the rough terrain. The use of methamphetamine, better known as crystal meth, was particularly prevalent: A pill form of the drug, Pervitin was issued to keep the German soldiers going for three days and nights in attacking through the Ardennes. This was needed to reach the French border town of Sedan, and to not give the Allied armies of Britain and France, who were mostly in Belgium, time to race back and defend the French homeland.

The same drug use is true for attacks on the eastern front against the Soviet Union starting June 22, 1941. As the invasion wore on, some units ran themselves to exhaustion and even delusion. One Nazi company on the front lines, facing Soviet troops northeast of Leningrad near the Finnish border, were strung out enough they collectively became so paranoid about what they perceived as a Soviet attack they wound up firing all their ammunition one night against what were imaginary enemy soldiers. Later the next day the Soviet army did attack, easily taking over the German unit who didn't have anything to fire back with.

Due to increased Allied pressure on the German war effort, Nazi Germany had grown desperate for new soldiers to continue the war effort, and one way to mitigate the massive losses was to increase the combative power of the remaining soldiers in the Wehrmacht.

Though simpler drugs such as Pervitin and Isophan helped to keep soldiers properly stimulated, Vice Admiral Hellmuth Heye in March 1944 requested a drug that could also provide the users with superhuman strength and a boosted sense of self-esteem.

Pharmacologist Gerhard Orzechowski and a group of other researchers were commissioned in Kiel to develop this drug, and by later in the year developed a formula which contained in each tablet: 5 mg of oxycodone (brand name Eukodal), 5 mg of cocaine,

and 3 mg of methamphetamine (then called Pervitin, now available under the brand name Desoxyn).

Nazi researchers found that equipment-laden holocaust victims (inmates from Sachsenhausen concentration camp) could march in a circle for up to 90 kilometers per day without rest while carrying a 20 kilogram backpack. One of the biggest drug users in the whole Nazi regime of course was Adolf Hitler himself, taking and being injected with dozens of different medicines and mixed serums on a daily basis.



German 6<sup>th</sup> Army soldiers marching to Stalingrad, 1942. Tragic that fine young men should be wasted on such a twisted ideology.

An epic battle of the war lasting from 23 August, 1942 to February 3, 1943 had been concluded at a city in the Soviet Union called Stalingrad. It was amongst the bloodiest battles of the war, marked by brutality and disregard for military and civilian casualties. It was a human body grinder. The combined deaths from both sides of military and civilian casualties amounted to as high as two million deaths. The Red Army alone had over 500,000 of their soldiers killed in the protracted battle. The Soviet civilian casualties were higher.

The battle ended when the German Sixth Army, commanded by General Fredrich Paulus, surrendered the estimated over 90,000 soldiers left under his command. 35,000 had been evacuated due mostly to being wounded, the rest were dead, and these were left to surrender. It had started at over 330,000 of some of Germany's best troops. Paulus had consistently heeded Hitler's directives to not break out of the encirclement the Soviet Army had gotten the Nazis in, and all his soldiers surviving the battle became Soviet POWs. Less than 5,000 of them made it home alive after the war's end. The German soldiers captured by the Soviets were literally left to freeze to death and starve.

The Soviet Union was equally cruel on those Russian partisans who had fought the Germans behind the lines. As the Red Army pushed back the Germans on the Eastern

Front, these partisans who had fought so gallantly in great danger and very effectively behind the lines against the Nazis, and were now back in lands controlled by the Soviet Army, were viewed by Stalin as having been politically corrupted by living out of total Soviet control and were sent to suffer in the vast Soviet Gulag prison camps.

Walter Warda was a German soldier captured in eastern Romania in 1944. "The first camp I came to was Zelenodolsk on the Volga River. We went in with 3,500 guys, and in a half year there were only 500 left. The Russians didn't do anything for us. They let us die deliberately."

"In one camp along the Volga, Every night, six to eight men died and the Russians would say, 'It's still too few. More of you must die.'" He was taken from camp to camp within Russia, at times escaping only to be recaptured. He worked unloading ships of American planes at the Black Sea port of Constanța. Until 1950 he was a POW of the Soviet Union, when he was finally released and able to make it back to Germany and see his parents.

In 1954 he immigrated to the United States and settled in Texas, got married and had a family and a successful life and still lives in Texas as of this writing.

World War II Multimedia Database  
www.worldwar2database.com



German 6<sup>th</sup> Army soldiers march into Soviet captivity. General Paulus surrendered the 6<sup>th</sup> Army on January 31, 1943. Of the over 330,000 men under his command, half were already dead or dying, about 35,000 had been wounded and evacuated from the Stalingrad front. The remaining 90,000 were hauled off or marched off to Soviet POW camps to die.

Later in 1943 from 5 July to 23 August what's given as the largest tank battle in WWII occurred at the Kursk salient on the Eastern Front with the Nazis attacking. After Stalingrad, the entire eastern front was at a strategic standstill. A 150 mile wide north to south, and 100 mile deep east-west salient had been pushed into the German lines with the city of Kursk at its center. Hitler planned to close this, trapping a huge group of Soviet forces and regaining the initiative on the eastern front. Again, Hitler's decision delays – moving the start date of Operation Citadel from 3 May to 5 July, waiting for the new non-field tested Panther and Tiger tanks enabled the Soviets to massively prepare multiple lines in depth and assemble large forces to fight the Nazi attack that was designed to prevent any further large scale Soviet operations in 1943. British breaking of the German Wehrmacht secret code kept the Soviet regularly informed of Nazi plans. The Soviets outnumbered them 3 to 1 and it was a six week long tank, infantry slug match. Popular German figures are 2,700 tanks, 2,500 aircraft, 10,000 artillery guns and mortars, and 500,000 to 750,000 men, and Soviet forces are given as 1,300,000 men, 3,600 tanks, 2,650 aircraft and reserves of 500,000 men. The number of tanks involved was very large but recent research by Valeriy Zamulin, Russian military historian and Prokhorovka Battlefield Museum posits the actual number of tanks, 978 in total, 306 German and 672 Soviet with 400 Soviet and 80 German tanks destroyed, are far less than commonly given. This was most probably an underestimate of the actual numbers, as the battle took place over 15,000 square miles and involved many units with two million men from both sides.

The Soviets were helped tremendously by intelligence from the British code breaking team at Bletchley Park in England. The Germans later commented that everytime they



attacked, the Soviets were there waiting to fire on them. The British were reading the secret German military field orders transmitted to their units in Operation Citadel almost as soon as they were written and sent by the German high command. Then they passed on the information to the Soviet Army command.

The British had done a great job in deciphering the Enigma machine the Germans thought unbreakable. This effort was greatly helped by the capture of the German submarine U-110 on May 9, 1941, when a German Naval Enigma machine was taken off the sub and her Kurzsignale code books. This contributed to breaking the German naval Enigma messages sent. The Bletchley Park code breaking team contributed greatly to Allied war efforts in North Africa, the Mediterranean, the Battle of the Atlantic and the Allied invasion of Italy and Europe. It was said German field commanders could have received their orders from the German High Command as fast from Bletchley as from their headquarters.

On July 9, 1941, crackjack British cryptologists broke the secret code used by the German army to direct ground-to-air operations on the Eastern front.

British and Polish experts had already broken many of the Enigma codes for the Western front. The Enigma machine, invented in 1919 by Hugo Koch, a Dutchman, looked like a typewriter and was originally employed for business purposes. The Germany army adapted the machine for wartime use and considered its encoding system unbreakable. They were wrong. The Brits had broken their first Enigma code as early as the German invasion of Poland and had intercepted virtually every message sent through the occupation of Holland and France.

Now, with the German invasion of Russia, the Allies needed to be able to intercept coded messages transmitted on this second, Eastern, front. The first breakthrough occurred on July 9, regarding German ground-air operations, but various keys would continue to be broken by the Brits over the next year, each conveying information of higher secrecy and priority than the next. (For example, a series of decoded messages nicknamed "Weasel" proved extremely important in anticipating German anti-aircraft and antitank strategies against the Allies.) These decoded messages were regularly passed to the Soviet High Command regarding German troop movements and planned offensives, and back to London regarding the mass murder of Russian prisoners and Jewish concentration camp victims. This is from the History.com authors and A&E Television Networks.

The Japanese used most of the techniques of Enigma in designing their "unbreakable" codes. Though the Japanese was hard to break because of the complexity of the Japanese written language, the Americans did it and named the Japanese system code Purple.

The largest tank battle could also be the Battle of Brody 23-30 June 1941 during the opening phases of Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union.

During Kursk Soviet civilians dug 2,500 miles of trenches and anti tank ditches with Soviet soldiers manning heavily mined and armed seven defensive lines in the Kursk salient. The Soviets expended their men freely. The Nazis were pushed back. It was a tactical victory for the Nazis but a strategic loss. The Nazis in some estimates had 200,000 casualties and lost 500 tanks and the Soviets had 860,000 casualties and lost 1,500 tanks. The Germans had rushed their new Tiger tank into the battle. It broke down frequently but was a formidable and destructive weapon against the Soviets. When the Allies landed in Sicily on July 10, Hitler drew off forces from Citadel to transfer to the Italian theater, causing a weakening of the German forces at Kursk.

## Chapter Forty

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Fillip Muller and others in the Sonderkommand at Auschwitz-Birkenau had been plotting to try and break out of the death camps. They figured a group of Polish prisoners about to be gassed would be a good bet as they spoke the same native tongue and the Polish people would know the surrounding area and help their escape to the mountains, and these people should be more aware of the truth about what was happening to them and ready to join them as they now had nothing to lose by fighting.

They waited until the summer of 1943 when a nocturnal group of Poles arrived from Bialystok, about to be killed. One of their members recognized the wife of a friend. He told her they were about to be gassed and then cremated, and she believed him.

She became hysterical, tearing her hair, and clothes, rushing around madly trying to warn all the people. The people didn't understand and though they slowed down, continued with their undressing with exhortations from the SS men that the lady was crazy and they would soon have soup as soon as they finished their showers.

SS man Hossler exhorted them, blasting the air with his whistle. "Now look here you people,..keep calm, in your own interest! Do keep calm!" Again he blew his whistle, and more politely, "Ladies and gentlemen!"

But the lady popped up suddenly from the crowd in front of him, screaming, "You want to kill us with gas, I know!"

Hossler tapped this forehead in saying to ridicule the woman, "You must be out of your head, my good woman, who told you that cock and bull story?"

"I do know that you want to kill us with gas, kill us, that's what you want to do Herr Kommandant!" She shouted in reply.

But now the thousand men, women, and children ordered to undress started to believe the woman. They had started to press toward the front of the room where the door to the outside was, unnerving the SS men and guards.

Hossler had to talk fast, "Ladies and gentlemen! What in Heaven's name has got into you? I've read the Ortskommandant's (the senior commander of troops in a town) report...the authorities appear to have been quite happy with you Jews in the ghetto. You did your work well and proved you were good workers. Living conditions here are much better. But in return we do expect discipline. Now just get yourselves undressed and ready for your shower. Surely you're not going to listen to a lunatic?...Refusing to obey orders really doesn't pay. There's a war on and everyone must do his or her duty."

The door to the outside yard was opened. Hossler had just been buying time. There stood multiple SS guards, flanked by a pack of dogs straining at their leashes, baring their fangs, ready to pounce; the guards, weapons in hand, ready to fire.

Some of the children started to cry, their mothers and fathers lifting them up to comfort them. Now in the face of deadly force the people understood resistance was useless.

Hossler shouted, terse and succinct, "For the last time, do you want to stay alive and work, or are you going on refusing to get undressed?" Children continued sobbing, now men and women were crying. "Be quiet!" cried Hossler harshly, "Do be sensible, it is for your own good." The people vacillated between hope of life and a terrible, creeping disappointment.

They so wanted to believe and trust. How happy they would be if they could have continued living and working.

Filip Muller turned to a prisoner in his group about using this crowd to spark a fight against the SS. The man had been an officer in the Greek army and a member of the camp Résistance. Muller thought he would know what to do. The man said it was absurd, to for sure die anyway with these people, even if heroic. Better to bide their time and strike when the opportunity and arrangements were much better. Of all the places in the world, this was the least likely place of saving human lives. One by one the crowd was turning away and undressing.

Soon all in the group were dead, except for the woman whom the SS tortured to find out who told her they were about to be gassed. They had well practiced methods to make her talk. She broke, revealing who told her. As she was being shot, the rest of the Sonderkommands were made to watch as their friend was tied up and pushed into the oven to burn alive.

After a heroic defense of Wake Island in December 1941, the Japanese finally overwhelmed the Americans fighting there.

In late afternoon of October 7, 1943, 98 civilian American POWs on Wake, all contractors for Morrison-Knudson who had been captured during the 1941 battle for the island, were blindfolded with hands and feet bound and seated along side a ditch facing the sea. Three platoons of Japanese soldiers then gunned them down with machine guns and rifle fire. One American escaped as reported by a Japanese sailor. All the bodies were dug up and counted and confirmed that one was missing. He was captured and personally beheaded by the island's commander, Admiral Sakaibara, three weeks later.

These 98 were what was left of 1,150 civilian contractors on Wake sent to build various American military installations. Combat, disease, and shipment to Japan and China had reduced their numbers to these 98 left who had been made to work for the Japanese against the Geneva Convention Agreement.

On the beach at Bangka-Belitung island just off Indonesia in 1942, Japanese soldiers gunned down 22 shipwrecked Australian nurses. There was one survivor, Vivian Bullwinkle. The Sandakan Death Marches were a series of forced marches in Borneo from Sandakan to Ranau which resulted in the deaths of more than 3,600 Indonesian civilian slave laborers and 2,400 Allied prisoners of war. The 38 prisoners left alive at Ranau were shot by their guards, possibly 12 days after the War's end.

## Chapter Forty One

Pop was given leave to go home after the Division had been at Camp McCoy for a year, so he took the train back to Texas. He was so glad to be home on Shawnee Prairie. It was *home*! Memaw had given him a big hug and they just started visiting and talking about what was happening on the farm and what all he had been doing.

They heard the sound of a car pulling up, looked out and saw a young delivery man approaching. It was a telegraph delivery boy. Pop was ordered to leave at once back to Camp McCoy. He had been home barely thirty minutes. He was to travel post haste to Dallas and catch a plane to Wisconsin. Pop grabbed his bags and Papaw drove him to Dallas. They arrived at Love Field when the full plane was getting ready to take off. Pop showed his orders to the airline and they took a well dressed woman off and put him on. "She was pretty upset but I didn't have any choice. I had orders.", and he was off to war.

He flew up and reported to Camp McCoy. He was then ordered to join an advanced party of officers that would go before the division to prepare the place it was to arrive at in Northern Ireland. Pop and all of his fellows were eager to get over there and get the job over with. The commander of their group was the division G4, the top logistics officer of the Second Division. They embarked in New York on the Queen Mary, the luxury cruise liner built in 1936. It was one of the fastest ships afloat, and at 85,000 tons, one of the largest. It sailed unescorted.

There were fifteen thousand American soldiers on board and eleven hundred crew, which were all British.

They were served meals twice a day, fish and potatoes, or fish and chips as the Brits called them. The Queen Mary cruised at 33 knots. And it changed course frequently, endeavoring to dodge the deadly German subs, especially when they hunted together in the dreaded wolfpacks, though their threat had been reduced by joint efforts of the Americans and British.

Dad said some days it would be cold, and in a day or so it would be warm as they zigzagged over the Atlantic. They came into Northern Ireland and traveled to Armagh, Ireland.



Here they commandeered buildings for headquarters, barracks with the full permission of the Irish government, reconnoitered potential areas for training and training schedules, and set up lines of supply.

The division soon followed, disembarking on October 18, 1943 at Belfast, Ireland. Once the thousands of men were housed, equipped and

feeding systems were set up, training began. It was more serious than ever. They were now overseas and knew the next step for the division and themselves was to confront the Nazi forces in actual combat. That daily realization overhung everything they did. They just didn't know when the confrontation would happen.

Quonset Hut scene of some of some of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. housing & offices

Ireland was a wonderful country. The men were at first a little taken back. The weather was generally overcast with long, slow rains and swirling fogs. A hovering constant mist kept the countryside a dazzling green. Pop loved the people there. They were friendly and welcoming, inviting the American soldiers into their homes, with dances being held at local halls, well attended by pretty Irish young ladies.

On Pop's staff were Sgt. Wichman, a Regular Army soldier, and Sgt. Ralph Clifford. Sgt. Wichman from San Antonio did graphic work for Pop and free handed a great pencil portrait of Pop while they were in Ireland. Pop said Sgt. Clifford was great at all the secretarial operations necessary for his office.



Pencil sketch of Capt. Poland by Sgt. Wichman

Ireland was a smaller, more inhabited country than the areas they had held large area maneuvers in Texas, Louisiana, and Wisconsin. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division was becoming an extremely well trained and organized outfit at all levels. So the Division concentrated on small unit training from platoon, company, with the largest being mostly battalion size.

As assistant Second Division Engineer, Pop participated in all the meetings at Division level involving any Second Engineer Battalion training or support of the infantry division units in their training. He was issued a Bigot Card. This meant that he had top secret clearance for just about everything going on anywhere in the lead up to the actual invasion. There were only ever issued one thousand such cards and clearances for the whole theater. Pretty heavy duties for a twenty four year old.

The average age of all American men involved in the European Theater was twenty six. Twenty five years later with the Vietnam War the average age of all the military personnel was nineteen.

Most of their time was spent training. But Pop would get leave as the rest of the men did. He sometimes caught a ride on a B-17 going over to Scotland or London for some R&R. As he traveled through the English country and towns the roads would be lined with mile after mile of English fields filled with tanks, jeeps, armored personnel carriers, trucks, anti-tank guns, artillery pieces, piles of food, supplies and depots of ammunition stacked all over the place. Pop didn't drink so he would try to find a show in London or some dance to attend, and also stop and get a good meal. When asked if he ever saw a floor show while in London, he said, "I saw a girlie show. I didn't know that's what it was when I went in, and after I got in it was so crowded I couldn't get out."

But most of Pop's unit's time was spent training, training, *training*. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion was in training such as practicing clearing mines or building bridges or blowing up bridges in support of the various infantry regiments and battalions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division. Pop and his staff worked out of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Div. headquarters as the Assistant Division Engineer office.

The infantry units would practice assaults, coordinating together on assaults, movements, and various tactics. Pop would get the orders as to how the various companies of the engineer battalion would attach to the various infantry units and how they would be involved in that training with the infantry units. He would go out to the various training exercises to make sure Col. Warren's orders were being correctly communicated and coordinated with the infantry units.



2<sup>nd</sup> Bn Engineers practicing launching Bailey bridge across the River Bann in Ireland.

Below left: activating an antitank mine. Middle: probing for mines. Right: blowing gap in mine field.



Typical training classes covered fuses, explosives, wiring, and placement.

One entry from Lt. Col. Snetzer's diary tells about their training in Ireland in early '44.

"27 January: Thursday, Just completed 10 successive nights of night training. Hours from 1830 to 0330, but usually longer. Built 27 bridges across Newry Canal, 9 Bailey in period, also mine detection and road blocks, 3 assault crossings of river with 3 different Inf. Bns. And other Engr. Training. It was rough and rugged. Rained every single night, in the black of the moon and couldn't see a thing. Coldest and windiest weather in Ireland yet." No matter the weather or day or night, the training wasn't stopped.



## Chapter Forty Two

America's world war on the other side of the Earth was going strong. General Douglas MacArthur and Admiral Chester Nimitz were steering the two major campaigns with brutal efficiency, yet also with extremely efficient use of their soldiers and sailors lives. Supreme confidence and deep military competence kept their campaigns consistently moving forward. An example of General MacArthur's confidence was in the February 29, 1944 attack on Los Negros as outlined in the book, "American Caesar" by William Manchester, a book I've always thought a bit misnamed.

A highly risky approach was taken on Los Negros, with supplies to follow the assault from three hundred miles away, and with MacArthur assuming the airfield would soon be in American hands. He also assumed the Nipponese enemy commander would feed his men in piecemeal, where they could be destroyed.

The American attack here was going to be a close one, against four thousand Japanese troops. General MacArthur was going in with the assault troops, having often forbidden his other commanders to do the same. At dawn on February 29 when they dropped anchor off Hyane Harbor at Los Negros and were bracketed by enemy shore guns, the crew ducked behind cover, expecting the third shell to hit amidships where the General stood tall against the rail and gazed out to shore. An American cruiser hit the Japanese shore battery just at that time.

Six hours later General MacArthur went ashore in a pouring rain. The fighting was heavy. GIs of the First Calvary Division were lying prone with steel helmets and camouflaged battle dress. The General in his yellow trench coat and pipe awarded the Distinguished Service Cross to the leader of the first assault, then strolled casually inland. An anguished aide warned that he was in "very intimate danger." The General lit up his corncob pipe and explained he wanted to "Get a sense of the situation". A lieutenant pointed out a path where

they had just killed a Japanese sniper. McArthur nodded "fine. That's the best thing to do with them." He walked on, stumbling over the bodies of two still warm enemy bodies, saying, "That's the way I like to see them."

A GI called out, "You're beyond the perimeter sir!" McArthur thanked him and continued on, with his terrified staff accompanying him, especially his new physician, Dr. Roger Egeberg.

One of the staff, Kenney, knew the air strip was the most dangerous place on the island because the Japanese were fiercely contesting it, but he had told General McArthur it could be the most important place in the theater. He wished he hadn't because McArthur then headed straight for it. From the Japanese bodies found there later, officers estimated four hundred pair of enemy eyes were watching from the air strip edge as McArthur wandered up and down the strip, stopping to dig into the coral surface to see how solid it was. From a *Saturday Evening Post* correspondent with the group, "With his yellow trench coat swinging out behind and smoke trailing out from his pipe, McArthur paced off the puddled coral runway himself. At first the width, and then down the length, far outside our lines."

One dumfounded Cavalryman later said, "Why they didn't kill him, I don't know." Soaked and covered with mud the General returned to his ship satisfied that that the battle was going okay, and no evacuation was necessary. The Japanese commander did just as McArthur predicted, counterattacking in small, piecemeal charges. The island was taken.

Prentis Moore from Manning, Texas, who had known Dad well growing up there, who was at Pearl Harbor when it was attacked, served with the Marines as they fought across the Pacific. He was lucky he said, as he was always sent in on the island attacks in the second wave. As he got nearer to the shore with each amphibious landing he saw bodies in the shore waters and waves red with the blood of those in the first wave. Once inland he operated a bulldozer building airstrips, on land bought with more blood.

Earlier in the war Dad's oldest sister Gladys, had joined the Navy Waves as an officer specializing in finance. She flew from the U.S. mainland to Hawaii in a plane full of generals and admirals, and spent the war in Hawaii working in the Navy's finance department there. She went on to make a career of the Navy and retired a full commander, at that time the second highest rank for a female in the Navy.



Gladys Poland: Naval Officer  
(picture torn bottom right)

Another fellow from Lufkin, Gaston Meadows, was a married man working for the railroad in Lufkin. The railroads in the United States were hauling freight at a frantic pace. There wasn't the interstate highways of today and large loads of massive quantities could only be taken from one place to another by rail. One rail man in Nacogdoches, Texas said they worked six, seven days a week, often ten to twelve hours a day. "But this was war." He said.

Gaston saw a lot of his friends who had gone off to serve in the military and wanted to do more, even though he already had a family, so he talked to an Army recruiter. The man told him he could work in the Army as a railroad specialist since that was what he knew in civilian life. When Gaston completed basic training and was getting ready to find out where his assignment would be for railroads, they said he was in the infantry. "No, they told me I was going to be assigned to railroads."

"You're in the infantry." He was told in no uncertain terms. So Gaston landed in the 17<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division as a rifleman in an infantry squad and fought in combat on Saipan and Okinawa.

On November 20-23 1943 the battle of Tarawa occurred. Marshall Daily from Lufkin, Texas was a Marine in the attack on the tiny parrot shaped Island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll. It was two miles long and eight hundred yards across at its widest point. The Marine commander had requested a lot longer massive navel bombardment but was given a shorter time line to attack. The battle of Guadalcanal had recently been concluded and now an amphibious attack by the Marines was launched which was fiercely resisted by the Japanese.

The American planners hadn't taken into account the low tide approach to the beach being attacked that had a reef almost breaking the surface. The landing craft got hung up on it and the Marines had to wade through chest and waist high water three hundred yards to the beach. Hundreds were killed and wounded right at the start. One Marine happened to be the base plate carrier in a four man mortar squad and held the heavy metal base plate in front of him as he waded in. Bullets constantly pinged off it.

Finally Marines made it to shore but were pinned down on a narrow strip of the beach. Major Michael P. Ryan started trying to go around to the right of the beach and penetrate into the part of the island with a group of Marines and some tanks in an area a little less defended called Green Beach. Marshall was in that group.

In 76 hours the battle was over. The Japanese were dug deep into concrete bunkers all over the island. They had to be blasted and burned out. Almost to a man the 4,500 Japanese soldiers had fought till all were dead, only 17 lived to surrender.

The Americans incurred the same amount of casualties in this 76 hours on Betio as they had in six months on Guadalcanal, itself a brutal, bloody battle. But the island was taken.

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After twenty two months working at Landeshut, Gerda Weissmann and her group were sent on May 8, 1944 to a slave camp at Grunberg to work at a weaving mill. The mill director, the Betriebsleiter, was tall and slender. On his right hand he wore a large signet ring. It had a reputation. The first morning the group took the shower they were to get every two weeks. They lined up in the hall to the shower entrance. The director came through. All froze. A

few girls continued talking with their faces to the wall, not seeing him. He pounced on one, digging his ring and fingers into her face, leaving it brutally torn and bloody. He walked off with her blood dripping from his hand. The poor girl just turned her face to the wall.

Another time, while marching to the plant, a piece of bread was pitched over the wall. The hulky SS guard shouted as to who threw it. Even after beating each of thirty girls in the face, including Gerda, no one told. With that, Gerda felt her wall of mental and emotional strength, pretty solid till now, severely weakened.

Every two months a procedure all the girls dreaded happened, they were X-rayed and examined by a doctor for possible tuberculosis. If found with TB the girl was immediately sent to Auschwitz to be gassed. One girl whom Gerda had gotten to know very well failed. She and Gerda hugged, crying, before she and the others were sent to Auschwitz. There was nothing else to say. Both Gerda, Ilse, and Suze passed the latest one.

## Chapter Forty Three

Col. Warren sent Dad to a special ordnance school in England for three weeks taught by the British Army. It taught men how to diffuse different types of bombs. It was learning precise type procedures in what would be extremely dangerous situations.

One of the infantry regiment commanders, a Colonel Humphries, commander of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment, ordered Dad to set up a training regime for the infantry soldiers in attacking an enemy held pill box. This would typically be a concrete block house, rounded on top. It would house machine guns and other heavier weapons. The approach up to it would typically be cleared of brush and trees so the enemy had free fields of fire.

Pop had an enemy pill box built to certain specifications and manned it with four men. They were housed below ground and operated various movements of silhouettes and dummies meant to simulate enemy soldiers in the pill box-bunker. The infantry soldiers would then attack it with live ammunition, practicing various unit maneuvers, clearing pathways of mines and barbed wire, firing while others advanced, and then trading functions, maneuvering around with satchel charges and bazookas until the bunker would be taken. Col. Humphries was pleased with the way the pill box was set up and functioning and with the training itself.

Col. Humphries was a West Point graduate and the same class as Col. Warren, who was also a close friend. Pop said Col. Humphries was one of the finest caliber of men he had ever met. Col. Humphries was later killed.

Once Pop and some of his fellow officers paid a fee and got a chance to go fox hunting there in Ireland. They went to pick out their horses. "This one's for Poland." Said one of the men, "He can handle it." It was very spirited and jumped around a bit. The others didn't know how to control it, but Pop got up on it. Years of being the best horse breaker and rider on Shawnee Prairie made light of controlling this one.

On horses they went bounding over the green fields of Ireland, chasing a wily fox as it was pursued by a pack of hounds. They would gallop at breakneck speed and jump over the fairly low fences bordering the fields. Horse jumping a fence wasn't something they were use to. Horses were used for herding, for work, but these horses were trained. Pop and his buddies would run the horse at a low place in the fence put there for that purpose, and trust the horse to lift itself and rider over without crashing. To a group of young men mostly from Texas it was great sport. There were a lot of sugar beet fields in the area and they'd bound right across them and over the bordering stone fences. Pop was glad he was on the spirited horse, it had great energy and flew over the fences whereas some of the guys had a little trouble getting over.

The training got more serious. In early February the engineer units began training with all kinds of live mines and British explosives. They also completed their intensive bridge training with night work in putting bridges across streams and rivers.

On February 23, 1944 Staff Sgt Roberson and Pfc Elkins of C company were killed when they lifted an AT mine when it was activated and blew up in their face. Both died in a few hours. The training with live mines continued unabated.

The unsinkable natural carrier of Great Britain was host to two and a half million American soldiers, sailors, airmen and many thousands of tanks, jeeps, artillery pieces, trucks, aircraft, ships, landing craft, and millions of tons of explosives, ammunition, food, rifles, medical supplies, tents, and all the many other supplies that were needed, with more continuing to flow in from America – the Arsenal of Democracy. This was in addition to the food and supplies to keep the English people and country on its feet and in addition to the huge amount of arms, ammunition, food, weapons, tanks, and trucks that were also sent to the Soviet Union through Persia, now Iran, and Murmansk and Archangel, ports in the Russian Arctic. This was in addition to the men and materials sent to the Pacific Theater.

Detailed planning of the invasion to liberate Europe began in 1943 by a combined British-American staff headed by a jointly picked British Lt. General Fredrick Morgan. He picked Normandy as the landing site. When U.S. General Eisenhower became the overall Allied commander this staff became his.

England for the time being was also the home of this huge army of men and materials, and young men, when leave could be had away from the intense training, did their best to entertain themselves. The British said the Americans they were overpaid, over sexed, and over here! However, with so many of their men away the British women were often happy to be invited to dances where young, handsome, free spending American men were in attendance. Popular songs would be “Delores” by the Merry Macs, “Serenade in Blue”, “String of Pearls” and “Elmer’s Tune” by Glenn Miller’s band, “Paper Doll” by the Mills Brothers, “Begin the Beguine” by Artie Shaw, “In the Mood”, “Fly Me To The Moon”, “Pennsylvania 6-5000”, and “Stomping at the Savoy”, were some of the songs, with “Don’t Go Under the Apple Tree With Anyone Else But Me” by the Andrews Sisters, songs by Billie Holliday, Benny Goodman, and many more. The soldiers danced the jitterbug and slow danced with their partners.



In 1944 Bob Hope, the renowned popular Hollywood icon, star, and major USO troop tour entertainer, performed for U.S. Marines on the island of Pavuvu, the major island in the Russell island chain in the Pacific theater. It was a great show that the Marines thoroughly enjoyed, cheering and clapping at the show he and the rest of the entertainers with him put on.

Mr. Hope learned later that over 50% of those he entertained on Pavuvu had been killed in subsequent battles, mainly in the fight for the island of Peleliu. This battle occurred between September and November 1944.

In years to come when in interviews he was asked what had the most profound effect on him in all his many travels in entertaining the troops he would often mention the Marines at Pavuvu.



Marine Pfc Douglas Lighthouse (right) cradles his .30 caliber M1919 Browning machine gun in his lap, while he and Marine Pfc. Gerald Thursby Sr. take a cigarette break, during operations on Peleliu on 14th September 1944. (Colorized by Paul Reynolds. Historic Military Photo Colourisations)



## Chapter Forty Four

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Despite the Allied advances at the war fronts, more and more Jews were deported to Auschwitz, most to perish immediately after their arrivals in the gas chambers of Birkenau. Locomotives and rolling stock needed in war movements were instead kept working in the Nazi continuing mass killings. The industrialized murder systems of the Nazi's were working full tilt. In some instances it was said the timing was thirty minutes from coming off the ramp to going up in smoke. The world should read Mr. Muller's book, Eyewitness Auschwitz.

In February 1944 Filip Muller's Sonderkommando group had 200 prisoners chosen, telling them they were to be transferred to Lublin where strong men were needed for a special job. Most had been part of a group with SS Hossler in charge, that had taken part in removing all traces of mass graves near bunkers 1 and 2. Soon Filip learned his teammates had all been gassed as soon as they arrived in Lublin. This greatly heightened the daily fear of their sudden demise.

For years those still living had conspired to try somehow to fight back. They had three grenades hidden, a couple of pistols, and some knives, but with the Soviets closing in, the resistance leaders became more determined to strike out, giving everyone participating a chance at escape and to strike a blow against this murderous system and regain the self respect that daily was brutally wrenched from them. But some of the resistance leaders delayed any action in striking back in what would most probably be a losing battle, with the thin hope of them making it out alive with the Red Army's advance. With resistance leaders getting transferred or killed, even with the Red Army's successes they were still far off, and the thin hope of making it out alive began to fade.

In Auschwitz there was the Family Camp. It held thousands of families who had been transported from the Theresienstadt Ghetto in Czechoslovakia in September 1943. They didn't go through the deadly selection process at the bottom of the ramps coming off the train cars. They even were allowed to dress in civilian clothes. They got to keep their hair. They had nurseries for younger children and the older ones could be taught by Jewish teachers. They had to build their own camp structures, but were not used for forced labor and pregnant women and children were given milk, butter and white bread. They were allowed to write one post card a month and to receive one parcel from the outside. An excellent symphony orchestra was formed that even performed for the SS. There was even a hospital where

noted prisoner doctors and university professors worked, while just 100 meters away life was worth nothing.

Filip Muller and his mates could only speculate this group was used to show to the outside world how the Nazis really treated the Jews in the camps as films of them were distributed by the Nazis, and also to fool the International Red Cross that might visit. This turned out to be true.

Filip had frantically awakened Kommandofuhrer (SS man supervising a working team of prisoners) Voss from a drunken sleep where Voss had held a drunken promotion party with other SS men. Filip was cleaning up after the party and awakened Voss just before a special courier brought important orders to him.

Voss sat at his desk in the crematorium in deep consternation. It was with trepidation when Filip and his group were given orders by Voss in charge of their department that evening to hurry up and burn a pile of 500 bodies as quickly as possible, then scrubbing everything down and getting ready by eight the next morning for the bodies of a new batch of humans soon to be killed.

After pondering the orders he was given, in experiments earlier the SS found that less coke could be used to stoke the ovens and the cremation of the bodies go faster if well nourished bodies would be combined with starved ones, and children with adults. The two huge ovens had four burning chambers each. Prisoners worked in acrid smoke and fumes as the whole floor rumbled and trembled with the force and heat while no one noticed the remnants of people alive not long before, after an agonizing martyrdom, went rapidly up with the fiery smoke up the massive chimneys. Stokers raked out the glowing whitish ash out of the bottom of the burning chambers that had been live people only a short time before, to make room for more.

It turned out the rush was to make way for the thousands of Jews that had been living in the Family Camp. They had been set up there to fool any visiting Red Cross officials, and to make propaganda films of, but now were no longer needed to keep up the Nazi sham. Muller's group tried to get word to those in the family camp through prisoners working in the repair shop. One man's wife and children lived there. Maybe the people there could fight back somehow once they found out what their fate was. But repeated efforts failed to convince them to do anything. After all, they had lived in a fairly well treated ghetto before and for months now had lived relatively well in the Family Camp. They didn't know they had been set up to fool visiting International Red Cross. Hope contributed to their inertia. But now, when the SS knew the Red Cross wasn't coming any more, the 3,700 Czech Jews were told they were being transferred to Heydebreck to work there. First they had to take a bath and be disinfected in the sauna.

Late afternoon of 8 March 1944 saw heavy trucks rumble into the yard of crematorium 2. As the tarps were pulled back from the trucks, all SS pretense was over as men, women, children, the old, weak, and sick were viciously clubbed out of the trucks. The persistent rumor that those in the Family Camp were protected by the International Red Cross was totally burst.

With ashen faces of fear and grief their minds screamed why, why had Lagerfuher Schwarzhuber promised them on his word of honor as an SS leader they and their families would be going to Heydebreck? Why had they been promised the sick would follow as soon as they were well? Why had they been allowed to write letters to relatives and given rations for the trip? Why? Why? Why?

The SS men beat the 600 people into the crematorium changing room. After the gassing Filip Muller's group was to load the garments left behind on a truck in the yard. As a stoker Filip wasn't suppose to be there, but these were his countrymen. He looked through the half open dressing room door. Groups of desperate people crowded around the fake sign boards, knowing now they were fake. Young mothers were clasping their little ones to their breasts, while older children clung weeping to their parent's legs.

Hope and illusions had vanished; disappointment, despair and anger were left. People began to bid each other farewell, everyone in tears. Mothers caressed their children tenderly. Lagerfuhrer Schwartzhuber and Dr. Mengle appeared at the door. Those standing near vented their rage, shouting their hatred for the men and for them not honoring their word. "We want to live! We want to work!" Then other hollered, "You have cheated us! But your Hitler will lose the war! Then will come the hour of revenge. Then you will pay for everything, murderers!" Their appeals triggered no response from the SS leaders who looked at them impassively. Then some of the men rushed toward the door. They were immediately shot down by some fifty armed SS guards. Once more the SS men flung themselves to beating on the wretched crowd and letting their dogs charge them. They lined up machine guns in front of the crowd. Muller turned away, but the guns did not fire. The people had all crowded into one corner, shaking with terror, most badly hurt with the truncheon blows and the vicious dog bites.

Voss walked in front, holding his hands up and spoke, "...what is the meaning of this, you Jews? Your hour has come. There is nothing in the world that can reverse your fate...you can spare yourselves and your children a great deal of distress...Everything will be much easier if you get undressed quickly and then move on into the next room. Or do you want to make your children's last moments needlessly distressing?"

Most of the people began to undress and began to be shoved into the gas chamber. Anyone offering resistance was beaten to a pulp. Men crowded around their wives and children, trying to protect them from the blows and sharp teeth of the dogs.

Suddenly a voice began to sing the Czechoslovak national anthem and then the Hebrew song, "Hatikvah". The SS continued their beatings. Filip was proud of the bearing of his countrymen in this midst of this absolute hell. After all he had been through he felt that to go on clinging to his hopeless existence totally senseless. As he watched his fellow countrymen going into the gas chamber, proud, brave, determined, he asked what if I did miraculously survive, what would I have to go back to? No parents, no brother, no friends, or community, his house most likely occupied by strangers, no chance of the happy and carefree life he had known before. He had seen his father's own body cast into the ovens.

Taking his own life had never occurred to him, but now he decided to share the fate of his countrymen. He managed to mingle with the pushing and shoving crowd and quickly ran to the back behind one of the concrete pillars, remaining unnoticed. Everything to him had become meaningless, indifferent. Even the thought of death from Zyclon B gas, whose effects he knew too well, didn't move him, he faced his fate with composure.

People, their faces smashed and bleeding kept coming through the door to the chamber, driven by blows and the dogs. The singing had stopped. Now there was only weeping and sobbing. Desperate children ran around trying to find their parents. Suddenly a small boy was standing before Filip, looking up at him curiously, "Do you know where my mommy and daddy are?" he asked Filip timidly.

Muller tried comforting him, explaining that his parents were bound to be in front of the room with those milling around. "They'll be waiting for you, you'll see." The boy scampered off.

Filip looked up to see some fifteen people, some naked, some still clothed, looking at him. One called him by name, turning out to be the Family Camp's clerk who knew him. All insisted on him explaining to them why he wanted to die with them. He implored them not to speak to anyone as he knew it would take some time for the rest of the people to arrive and be moved into the chamber.

The atmosphere in the dimly lit gas chamber was tense and depressing. Death was close for all there. Parents hugged their children so tightly. No trace of them would remain. Suddenly a few girls, naked and in the full bloom of youth, came up to Filip Muller, gazing deeply at him. One spoke up, "We understand you have chosen to die with us of your own free will, and we have come to tell you that we think your decision pointless: for it helps no one. We must die, but you still have a chance to save your life. You have to return to the camp and tell everybody about our last hours,"

She went on, "...Perhaps you'll survive this terrible tragedy and then you must tell everybody what happened to you. One more thing," Then she asked him to take the gold chain from her neck after she died, when he came in to remove the bodies and give it to her boyfriend Sasha, who worked in the bakery. "...Remember me to him. Say 'Love from Yana.' When it's all over, you'll find me here." She pointed to a place near the concrete pillar. Muller was surprised and moved by her cool and calm demeanor and sweetness in the face of death. Before Muller could answer the girls dragged him protesting to the door and shoved him right out into the group of SS men there. They recognized him and proceeded to beat him with truncheons and fists each time he tried to get up. "You bloody shit, get it into your stupid head: we decide how long you stay alive and when you die, not you. Now piss off to the ovens!"

There his prisoner foreman Kaminski warned him never to do that again. Kaminski was highly intelligent and did whatever he could to help his fellow prisoners. "You are still young: it is vital that you should see everything, experience everything, go through everything and consciously record everything in your mind. Maybe you are one of those who one day will be free." The foreman slapping him encouragingly on the shoulder, "Now get hold of a fork or something so they don't catch you skiving!" Muller was encouraged to go on fighting for his life. Perhaps one day he *would* be free. Not too long after that, the SS for some reason began to suspect Kaminski as being involved with the camp resistance and killed him.

Filip could hear the trucks of the second convoy driving into the yard with the SS men shouting and the dogs barking. He tried not to but couldn't help but think of what was happening in the gas chamber, and of beautiful Yana, and her lover, Sasha. Though there were by now 1,000 people in the gas chamber a third convoy arrived and the people were driven into the chamber with the utmost brutality. The iron doors were shut tight and the Zyclon B gas pellets were delivered in the most horrible irony in a clearly marked ambulance, to those who then dropped them into the top of the chamber. Then piercing screams, wailing, banging on the chamber doors started, moaning and terrible gasping and coughing as the gas started to act. This began to change to a many-voiced dull rattle as the deadly gas produced an excruciating irritation of the throat and intense pressure in the head as it began penetrating into the lungs, quickly causing paralysis of the respiratory center.

Then the ambulance with its deadly cargo, the SS guards with their dogs and other SS leaders went to crematorium 3 to continue with other gassings there.

As soon as the Zyclon B gas came into contact with the air the deadly gas began to develop, spreading first at floor level and then rising to the ceiling. For this reason the bottom level of corpses always consisted of children, the weak, with the tallest and strongest on the top and near the door, with the middle aged men and women in between. The most based, primitive, survival instinct caused the strongest to force their way to the door and on top of the weaker ones.

People in heaps were lying entwined in each other's arms. Many of their faces had turned blue, many beyond recognition from the blows of the SS men or smashing into each other in sheer panic as the gas penetrated throughout the chamber. Urine, blood, vomit and feces were all over.

The fans were turned on, but Muller and his crew had to wear gas masks as the gas hadn't completely dispersed. They had great difficulty in prising the corpses apart though they were still warm.

It was terrible but strenuous work to disentangle and remove the corpses and drag them away. When the bearers began removing the corpses from the back of the chamber Filip went to the pillar where the girl said she would be. He found Yana's body. He reached down, took off her necklace and pocketed it.

Upon returning to camp he went to the bread store the next morning and found Sasha. Sasha had come from Odessa, having been a non-commissioned officer in the Red Army when he was taken as a POW. Of the 13,000 he was captured with in 1941, less than 100 by January 1945 were still alive. Sasha knew Filip and always smiled before, but today he was serious, knowing the Family Camp had been liquidated. When Filip handed him the gold chain and Yana's message of love, tears ran down his bronzed, scarred face. After a few long minutes of trying to control his emotions, he cried, "My dear Yana!"

He told Filip he saw her last a few weeks ago. They had discussed what they would do if they got out of Birkenau. She had not a single person left in the world. All her relations in Prague were dead. So they had decided to go to his mother in Odessa and marry there. After the events of the previous night Filip Muller had no strength to share in Sasha's sorrow nor any words of comfort. With tears in his eyes Filip turned and left. As he was walking away he was startled by the command, "Sing!" when he saw the penal company marching out into the spring landscape, singing the song of the nut brown maiden.

## Chapter Forty Five

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Martin (Marty) Weiss was born in Polana, Czechoslovakia on January 1929. His father Jacob was a subsistence farmer and meat distributor. His mother Golda ran their orthodox Jewish household and raised their nine children. Czechoslovakia became an independent democracy after World War I and the Weiss family were proud citizens of the new nation.

In 1939 Nazi Germany occupied Czechoslovakia and divided the country into Nazi control and Hungarian control. Martin's home town was under Hungarian control. Still, Jews were subject to the Nuremberg Laws, losing their rights as citizens. Jewish children could no longer attend public schools or universities. Thousands of Jewish men, including Marty's two brothers were conscripted into slave labor battalions and sent to the Russian front. Most Jewish businesses were confiscated, but Marty's father managed to maintain his, earning money by butchering the animals by night and selling the meat on the black market to keep his family alive.

Rumors of mass killings in Poland and the Ukraine made their way to Polana, but they knew no specifics. In April 1944 hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews, including Marty's whole family, were arrested, roughly grabbed from their home, and deported to the Munkacs Ghetto, where they performed slave labor in a brick factory. Marty said the Hungarian police who arrested and deported them were just as brutal as the Nazis. One brother had managed to escape to the United States earlier before and was living in New York.

Over a two month period beginning in May 1944, nearly 440,000 Jews, including Marty and his whole family were deported from the Hungary Ghetto to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Filip Muller and his Sonderkommando squad had heard rumors of the imminent extermination of Hungary's Jews. The ovens were all overhauled, the six huge chimneys given inspections and repair. The four changing rooms and the eight gas chambers were given fresh coats of paint.

Marty and his family traveled for three days and nights, crammed up to 125-130 people locked up in one car. He counted 120 cars in his train. He did this when the train went around a long slow curve and he could look out the one small window. On the way the train stopped to recharge the engine with water. Marty and everyone in the cars cried out for water, but were totally ignored. The hunger was terrible, but the thirst was the worst. They had to relieve themselves where they stood, crammed in with the others.

The longest known transport was from Corfu in Greece when 2,000 were transported to Auschwitz, taking eighteen days with all being locked into the cars the whole time. Upon arrival hundreds were dead with the rest dying. The survivors were immediately gassed.

Upon arrival at Auschwitz, Marty, his brother Moshe, his sister Cilia, their father Jacob, two uncles and a cousin were separated out and selected for slave labor. He learned a day later that all the rest of his family, his mother and the remaining five children, had been sent directly to be murdered in the gas chambers. Below, from The U.S. Holocaust Museum site.

"But we never heard of Auschwitz until we got there. It was late at night, twelve o'clock at night. They opened the doors and there were floodlights surrounding us. And you got off the train. If you ever saw bedlam, or if you could imagine hell, that must have been it. Because everybody was trying to hold on to their children; they tried to hold on to each other. And in the meantime, people in those striped clothes, which prisoners wore, which was the first time we saw them, walking around with big sticks screaming and shouting "*Schnell, schnell!*" "Get out!" and "Move, move fast!" And so everybody was trying to hold on and everybody was scared out of their wits. And the floodlights, like I said, were shining in your eyes."

"They had guards, with their finger on the trigger, I should say, and German police dogs are surrounding us. And until this day I don't know why because it was all enclosed in a yard with electrified fences. And nobody could run any place.

“As soon as we got off, they started separating us, men from women and so on. And then we had to go through a line. Everything had to move very very fast, high speeds. And these guys with the sticks were going around and forcing that. And the Gestapo was overseeing that. And they all, whether they were nasty or not, they had to act nasty. And some were, some were just acting that way. But nevertheless, they separated the men from the women. Then we had to go through a line, and the officer would stand there and go like this, left or right. If you went to left, you went to your death. If you went to right, you went to work. And so basically this was our initiation or our first experience in Auschwitz.

“And of course we never heard of the crematoriums. We never heard of anything like this. It wasn’t even in our vocabulary, it just didn’t exist.”

“I was actually small for my age. Turned out to be, I was the only one from the boys in my age to come through. From about 30 to 35 boys, all of them went first to their death the first night we came to Auschwitz. And the reason I attribute it to—I put on like two or three jackets because they told us about work, so I wanted to make myself look bigger and somehow I passed. And it was just a matter of luck actually.”

The Nazis had designed their level of industrial murder to new efficiencies, transporting many thousands of people in a matter of days, not feeding them anything on the way, then selecting only the most fit for slave work while the rest were sent to be summarily killed and then their bodies efficiently disposed of in the massive ovens of the crematorium of Auschwitz where Filip Muller worked. Often within thirty minutes the arrivals selected for immediate murder, after being brutally prodded and beaten into undressing and been shorn of hair to shouts of “Ras! Ras! Schnell(hurry)! Schnell!”, would be dead, and soon smoke up the chimneys. Those chosen for work would be hustled to a filthy barracks. As mentioned before, those who had been there for some length of time would cruelly tease the newcomers when they expressed fear for their loved ones, “Look up there,” they would say, pointing to the smoke coming out of the crematorium ovens, “They are going up the chimney. That’s where they are.” Perhaps this twisted teasing was a way for those already there to help deal with the horror.

New ovens had been built to add to the four already in full service there. These were built by the German firm Topf and Sons. The SS men and the Topf and Sons technicians had previously instructed the prisoners working there in various combinations to burn the bodies piled up near the ovens to see what worked best in getting them burned up the fastest. Muller’s group would rake out the grayish white ash, which just the day before had been people, to make way for more bodies to be consumed.

Marty, his father, uncle and cousin were sent to Austria to work on carving by hand tunnels into mountains for use by the Reich for weapons and other Nazi manufacturing. They worked on starvation rations, fed a kind of gruel of rotten turnips. There his father passed away due to overwork and starvation.

Filip Muller and his Resistance group had managed to hide two prisoners from the guards on a work detail outside the camp. Alarms were sounded all over but they had basically buried the men in a ditch wall and after a few days the men were able to crawl out under cover of darkness and make their escape. Filip’s group feverently hoped the men would report the ongoing tragedy of Auswitz somehow to the Allies to where this would be stopped, but months went by and nothing happened.

In April 1944 Filip and the camp Resistance had managed to hide another two men, Alfred Wetzler and Walter Rosenberg-Vrba. With great difficulty they had also gotten them part of a label from the Zyklon B poison gas canister, so to show the world what was being used to exterminate millions of innocent men, women and children, and with great hope put a stop to this hellish slaughter. But a month after their escape nothing happened. In May two more Jewish men, Czeslaw Mordowicz and Arnost Rosin managed to escape.

Even with the refurbished ovens, they weren’t enough to accommodate the burning of all the bodies soon to be coming from the gas chambers with the huge influx of Jews from



Hungary soon to be murdered in the summer of 1944. The Auschwitz commandant brought in SS Hauptscharfuhrer(Sargent Major) Moll, a short, thick set man who was cruel, depraved, and deadly. He had supervised the open, mass burning of corpses in the summer of 1942. His sadism, bloodthirstiness and lust to kill knew no bounds. He was also extremely efficient with boundless energy to oversee the mass extermination about to take place.

He oversaw the formation of five huge pits which soon began to be filled with bodies layered with wood, oil soaked cloth and other burning material, driving Eric Muller many other prisoners in this task mercilessly, along with his aides, when the many thousands of bodies were burned in huge fires, throwing smoke up to the skies. A group of mostly Greek Jews were tasked with shoveling out the human ashes after burning down and sprayed with water. The ashes were spread in the nearby forest or dumped into the nearby river Vistula. A lot were used to fertilize nearby fields, creating the largest Jewish cemetery in the world. Moll oversaw the installation of a concrete platform where any lumps of ash or bones left would be crushed into powder and disposed of.

He reveled in creating different, depraved, deadly games with prisoners, men, women, and especially naked young women he selected from those about to be gassed, in the fire pit areas, always resulting in their deaths at the end of the games; usually by his dispatching them with his silenced pistol or rifle. Babies he threw live into the boiling pits of human fat that sizzled at the ends of the pits in specially formed drainage channels. This fat was used for fuel for the fires there and in the ovens.

New rail lines to accommodate this huge influx of people about to be murdered were laid into Birkenau. The whistle of a train, the scream of the wheels, the hiss of steam from the valves, and the loud shriek of brakes indicated another transport of people had come to the ramps, where the shocked, arriving crowd then dragged itself along with children crying, women weeping amidst shouts and curses of commands. Instead of all this equipment for fighting against the Soviets, it was used for continuing the mass killing on a scale never before seen. Promises would be made again to each crowd seeing the huge rising black smoke cloud from the pits in the distance behind a large screen and smelling a sickly smell like burning meat, that they would soon get something to drink and eat if they would only come quickly and undress for their shower. Efficiency was important to make way for more transports arriving to get all this killing and body disposal of hundreds of thousands of people done in the few weeks allocated.



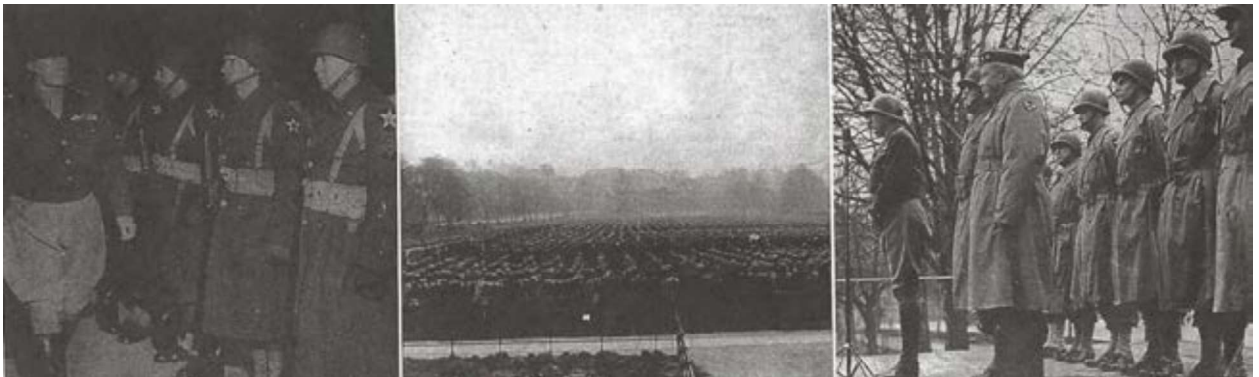
Most people arriving after going down the ramps and after any selections done, wanted to believe the terrible thirst and hunger they and their families were all tortured by would soon be relieved so they followed directions. Any groups that balked once they got to the death chambers found all pretense gone as the SS guards beat them into doing as commanded.

Burning of corpses in the open at Auschwitz. Not the layered method in the pits ordered by Hauptscharfuhrer Moll.

## Chapter Forty Six

The time in Northern Ireland was drawing to an end. General Patton made his rounds giving his famous speech to U.S. troops. On April 1, 1944, Pop and the whole Second Division assembled in the large, open Mall at Armagh there in Northern Ireland. General Patton was dressed in his shining military regalia as he gave his talk through a microphone, casting his voice over the thousands of soldiers.

“You are here today for three reasons. First, because you are here to defend your homes and loved ones. Second, you are here for your own self respect, because you would not want to be anywhere else. Third, you are here because you are real men...Yes, every man is scared in his first battle. If he says he’s not, he’s a liar. The real hero is the man who fights even though he is scared...a real man will never let his fear of death overpower his honor, his sense of duty to his country, and his innate manhood...An Army is a team. It lives, sleeps, eats, and fights as a team...Every single man in this Army plays a vital role. Don’t ever let up. Don’t ever think that your job is unimportant. Every man has a job to do and he must do it. Every man is a vital link in the great team.” General Patton ended his speech with, “You may be thankful that twenty years from now when you are sitting by the fireplace with your grandson on your knee and he asks you what you did in the great World War II, you won’t have to cough,...and say ‘Well, your Granddaddy shoveled s\_\_\_\_\_in Louisiana... That is all!”



General Patton at the Mall at Armagh where Pop and the Second Division Troops heard him.

After being almost sent back to the states after slapping two different soldiers he considered combat shirkers, in two different field hospitals after taking Sicily; the U.S. Army and British intelligence had used General Patton to build a whole invading army around, a

phantom one, in operation Fortitude. A large, fake headquarters was set up in an area of England across from the Pas de Calais, the shortest invasion route across the English Channel, the straightest path to Germany, and where Hitler and the German high command expected the Allied landing would take place.

Waiting there, among other units, was the well prepared and heavily armed German Fifteenth Army, a force of 150,000 enemy infantry and armored soldiers waiting there to decimate and throw back the Allied attack. Important sounding radio messages and orders flooded the airways from this fake headquarters in southeast England for German ears. Large areas of fake tanks and weapons were set up to deceive infrequent German reconnaissance planes flying over at 33,000 feet. Harbors directly across from the Pas de Calais were choked with mostly fake landing craft with a few real ones sprinkled in. This part of Operation Fortitude directly across from the shortest route to France was called Operation Quicksilver.

As Brian Murphy related in December 2005 in *America in WWII*, an English farmer saw that overnight a column of Sherman tanks had parked in his field. He cringed as suddenly one of his prized bulls charged headlong into a nearby tank. Expecting a bull with a cracked skull, but instead hearing the hiss of air as the fake tank collapsed, he was relieved. Operation Fortitude was in full swing with the fake First US Army Group in one of the most elaborate, massive, deceptions in history, and commanded by General Patton.

One phantom army was headquartered in Scotland and was to invade Norway. Hitler had kept up to 250,000 German troops stationed there because of a strong British commando raid on a Norwegian harbor right after the Germans overran the Country, and those Nazi troops continued to sit out the war, expecting an invasion in Norway that never came.

The massive ruse had to look totally real. Had to *be* totally real to the enemy. The fake First US Army Group had to be commanded by a top general, a real blood and guts, battlefield commander, giving the whole plan total credibility. General Patton fit the bill perfectly.

The operation to convince the German high command that the real invasion would come at the Pas de Calais and nowhere else, was crucial to cracking Hitler's Fortress Europe. The hope was that Germany would tie down the many thousands of troops and equipment guarding the Pas de Calais, keeping them from the real invasion at Normandy. The Allies plan to invade in Normandy would come to a terrible, deadly conclusion if German's massive infantry and panzer reserves garrisoning France's Pas De Calais region were brought immediately into the battle at Normandy, slamming into Dad and all his fellow soldiers just as they were getting their boots on French soil, turning a horrific fight into an even worse one.

Patton was livid at being so used and not being directly involved in the planning of and the actual invasion, but he followed his orders. After the success in North Africa in Operation Torch, his brilliant campaign in Sicily, and then the slapping incident, Patton had been ordered to Corsica, Malta, and Egypt, keeping the German command guessing as to where the Allies might attack, tying down their garrisons that might have gone against the Soviets and the Allies in France. Then in Operation Fortitude he was seen all about Southern England, giving speeches, supposedly operating out of a large headquarters as he prepared his army for the invasion, inspecting troops and equipment, giving (fake) orders, deceiving the Germans. After the actual landings Patton stayed in England to give further credence that he would still lead the real landings right to the closest point across the channel.

The German high command and Hitler himself were so convinced that the Allied attack would come at the Pas de Calais, that Hitler had given orders that the massive panzer and infantry units there of the Fifteenth Army, could only be moved from there on his personal orders. Operation Fortitude worked brilliantly. It would be weeks after the Normandy landings before de Fuhrer allowed them to move from there. When they did most of the troops would travel on bicycles.

Some German generals though thought Normandy would be the main Allied thrust. But Hitler's was the only opinion that counted. Furthermore, the Allies had long broken the similar Japanese Enigma code named Purple. The Japanese ambassador to Germany, Hiroswhi Oshima, a Lt. General, for years had been sending detailed reports from Germany, which were promptly read by Allied intelligence. In September of 1943 he had been given an extensive tour of the Atlantic Wall defenses by German officers and sent a detailed report back to Japan, which became valuable information to Allied planners of the D-Day operation.



Ambassador Oshima, third from left, touring the Atlantic Wall with German officers in September 1943



Japanese Ambassador Oshima with German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop in 1939. Oshima was committed to the Nazi cause.

In a week the Second Infantry Division moved by battalion on various modes of transport over the Irish Sea to Scotland to Tenby, Wales on a beach. There they quickly settled down and began intense training in beach landings. They practiced disembarking after their landing craft came ashore through the surf, setting charges and defending the landings and going ashore in units, training to get organized with their units and equipment and moving inland under simulated fire. The training was made as realistic as possible without killing the troops. The days of getting some time off were over.

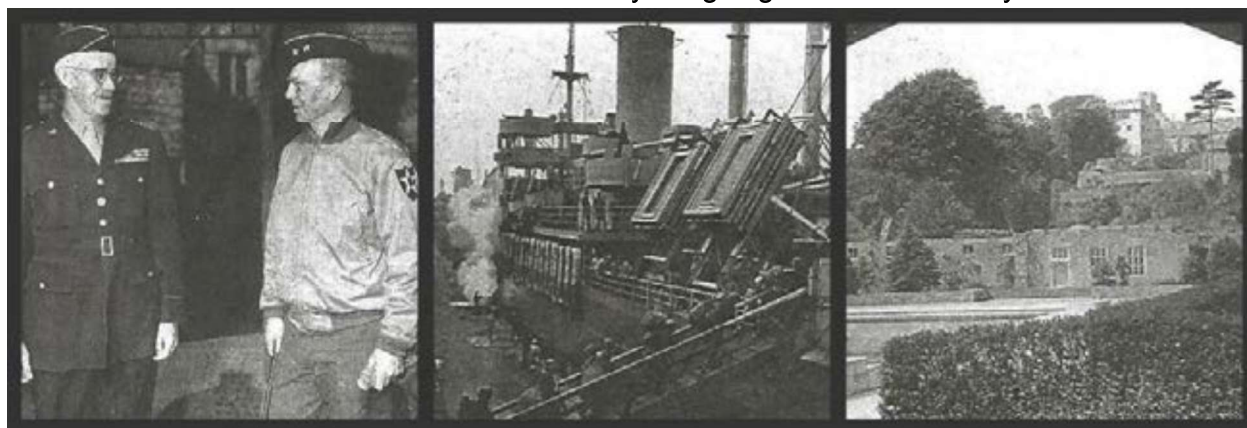
After a week of this they started moving to their kicking off points. Lt. Colonel Snetzer's diary describes his trip down to Donats Castle on the south coast.

"...Drove on by great RAF Airdromes. Saw hundreds of Beaufighters and big Lancasters parked everywhere. Stayed all night with 'A' Company at Wenvoe.

19 May: Friday, Left at 0800 in 2 ½ T for Bournemouth, 200 miles away on South Coast of England. On road into Cardiff saw crated air planes just stacked on shoulders of the roads for miles. Thru Cardiff and on to Newport. Marshalling Camps everywhere. U.S. Army equipment on every hand. Saw acres of jeeps parked under trees. Huge tank transporters by the dozens parked along main roads. Roads filled with convoys and single vehicles of every unit imaginable. From Newport up to Chepstow where we rode a little ferry across the River Severn, and thence into Bristol, home of 1<sup>st</sup> Army. Same U.S. Army everywhere. City

parks full of heavy equipment dispersed under trees and camouflage nets. Bristol nice looking city, wide avenues and teeming with activity. Continued on good English highways thru Shepton Mallet, Wincanton, Blandford (1<sup>st</sup> Div. ex-home), Winborne. Ammunition just piled along the roads for miles, unguarded, unfenced, and often uncovered. Armored units dispersed back in trees line fields on every hand.”

Pop and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion were billeted for a short time in the huge castle of Saint Donats, right on the beach on the inner part of the Bristol Channel, and all through it had suits of armor and arms from the times of England’s kings and nobles. They were there for a few nights, getting organized and ready for the invasion. How such a large body of men and material could move so rapidly and efficiently spoke of the training and efficiency of the American Army. There was no doubt about the mission. No doubt about everyone pitching in at all times. There was zero doubt about everyone going. This is what they had come for.



General Bradley with General Robertson

23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry (Loading)

& St. Donat's Castle

Early June 4<sup>th</sup> they started loading on various ships for the trip over the English Channel. Pop and the headquarters company of the Second Engineer Battalion were loaded on an LST. This stood for Landing Ship Tank, meaning it could carry tanks and all kinds of heavy equipment. On his ship it was mostly men and their personal weapons holding mainly Company B of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion. The Second Division was to follow the First Infantry Division onto Omaha Beach.

At that time the Normandy area was one of the most heavily photographed areas of the planet. Allied intelligence flew photo reconnaissance planes at great risk constantly over the whole area taking photos from cameras in the planes belly. On shore the French Resistance at great risks to themselves and their families gathered intelligence on German troops movements, weapons and other data to send to the Allies.

One young married English agent, right after France was occupied by the Nazis, got infiltrated into a small town in Normandy with the help of the French Resistance, and secretly stayed in communication with British intelligence back in England.

He became a harmless looking part of the community as a dim witted, clumsy young man working in a gas station. But he sharply noted each German who stopped at the station and traveled through the area, understanding clearly their conversations while they ignored him as a harmless town character.

After a couple of years the Nazis rounded up 27 suspected FFI in the area, including him, and put each of them through torture to find out what they knew and who was in the Resistance. The English agent kept his clumsy persona all through the brutal German

questioning, where they resorted to forcing his mouth open to pour in boiling water. Finally they lined him up against a wall with a firing squad. He kept his actions going all this time of the dim witted, harmless boy, acting as he didn't really understand what was going on. At the last second, before the command to fire was given, a German officer stepped out of a building and nonchalantly told the firing squad, "Never mind." The young man was spared. Three of the twenty seven Resistance members were killed during the torture. But not a single one talked.

Later he might be found at times fishing from bridges in the area. Harmless in view, but he knew the exact dimensions of his fishing pole and soon knew all the dimensions of the bridges from which he fished. Information invaluable to the soon to invade Allied troops and relayed to them along with other important data. When he returned to England to greet his wife after his years of duty in France were over, she saw his hair had turned white from the experience.

Seventy men back in Tenby, Wales had been picked from various units of the Second Infantry Division's Engineer Battalion to be formed into a platoon. Orders were sent to the engineer unit commanders to each send several men. The unspoken word was to send those who might be considered misfits or problem men. A Lieutenant Bunnis was picked to command the platoon. They were to be attached to the First Infantry Division to land on H Hour at Omaha Beach in Normandy. They were to land with Bangalore torpedoes and satchel charges to blow beach obstacles and clear paths through the many mines and massed barbed wire emplacements on the beach so the infantry could go through. They were going to be among the first to set foot on Nazi controlled Europe to start the liberation of a continent. Their casualties were expected to be very high. Almost one quarter of the soldiers to first set foot on mainland Europe on D-Day were combat engineers.

The whole Second Division continued getting on the ships. Soon all the ships holding the Division was moving to join up with hundreds, then thousands of other ships as they got ready to assault the Normandy beaches on June 5.

At the last minute, just before the airborne troops who were to start assembling at the planes to load on to jump into occupied France far behind the Normandy beaches, the most massive invasion in the history of the Earth was postponed one day because of the weather.

Literally hundreds of ships that were out in the stormy English Channel were turned round to refigure their navigation and line up again in their invasion sequence. The weather was deemed too rough for the landings. Ships were pitched wildly up and down in the wind tossed seas. Rain pelted the ships and any soldiers and sailors on deck. Seasickness was rampant.

But the next evening, General Eisenhower and his top Allied staff assembled to hear the latest from the British staff meteorologist. Security was totally strict. No one, no matter how high or low in rank, wasn't let into the meeting without close inspection of all their identification and clearances. The top Allied top commanders were all there.

At 39 Group Captain James Stagg had—until recently—been one of the rising stars at the British Meteorological ("Met") Office. Having started as a junior assistant at the Observatory at Kew, he had gone on to manage various facilities and field offices as well as lead polar and desert expeditions. He was also a geophysicist of some repute. Now he was Chief Meteorologist to the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF).

His appointment in November 1943 had actually caused some controversy. As a geophysicist he wasn't, strictly speaking, a weatherman himself and this had caused a considerable amount of grumbling from the genuine weathermen to be found in the British and American forces. The weather report was crucial to every aspect of the coming

landings, for the ships approaching the European coast, for the men in the ships, for the soldiers that would be landing on one of the most deadly and fortified places on Earth, for the many thousands of airborne troops about to jump into France and the transports that would fly them there.

The weather man had gotten an up to date estimate from a couple of ships stationed a thousand miles out in the north Atlantic, put there specifically to gauge the weather patterns that might affect the French coast. There would be a small window of clearing weather. Besides what the foul weather could do to paratroops drops and landing sites, there were a myriad number of other issues to consider, not least of these was how long the secret of where the invasion would take place could be kept from the Germans. Eisenhower got up from the table they were all sitting at, and walked up and down the room, stopping to ask different people questions, then went back to pacing with his head down; finally he stopped. He made the decision. It was a go.

The Germans loved the weather. They knew it was too rough for beach landings wherever that might occur. In fact they were confident enough that the Allies were putting things on hold for the time being that most of their top commanders in France and their staffs were heavily involved in war games. Colonel General Friedrich Dollman, the commander of the German 7<sup>th</sup> Army, ordered his Divisional and regimental commanders to leave their units and attend A Krigspiel, a staff war game in Rennes at 10 a.m. on June 6. He had been assured by German navel forecasts that the weather and rough seas was too bad for any invasion, even for air raids. And it would be several weeks before the next favorable tides and moon would be right for an invasion.

General Erwin Rommel, Commander of Army Group B, in charge of the half of France that included the northern French coast, had taken off June 5 to go home to celebrate wife Lou's birthday. Her birthday: June 6.



## Chapter Forty Seven

Pop and his company spent the night of June 5 in the wind and dark tossing about in the English Channel. The men all had their muscatte bags of personal effects, their weapons, and their bedrolls. The LST was basically a huge, floating cargo hold. It was cold in the huge, metal space with very little room on the deck above. The men would bundle up in their bedrolls and lay three or four together to try and keep warm. The ship was constantly pitching and rolling.

Tens of thousands of men tossing about in the ships, slated to go in at H hour of June 6 were getting thoroughly seasick. Tech Sergeant William James Wiedefeld of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division recalled hearing men say, "If they are going to kill us, get us out of these damn tubs."



Troops in hold of transport en route to Omaha Beach on D-Day. These ships were called LSI for Landing Ship Infantry. The LSTs were Landing Ship-Tank for transport of men and vehicles.

In one of the American bombers headed to drop loads of bombs on targets in France earlier that day, a crew member looked back and said "it looked like a highway of planes in the sky, as far as you could see."

Lt. Col. Meyer, the counterintelligence Chief of the German Fifteenth Army at Pas de Calais, burst into the dining room where General Hans Von Salmuth, the Fifteenth's commander was playing bridge. Meyer breathlessly told the General "The message, the second part – its here!" The message they had been waiting on, "Wounds my heart with monotonous laughter."

Months of intel work and monitoring messages coming into France from England told him the Allied invasion was due in 48 hours. But he still didn't know exactly where. General Von Salmuth nonchalantly gave the order to put the Fifteenth Army on full alert and went back to playing bridge, saying, "I'm too old a bunny to get excited about such things."

Back in his office Meyer and his staff notified OB West, Von Rundstedt's headquarters, Hitler's headquarters and all other commands were notified by teletype. For reasons never explained, the German Seventh Army was never informed. They occupied the large area Normandy and the Cotentin Peninsula where eighteen thousand American and British paratroopers were getting ready to drop into in three hours. It would take the Allied fleet a little more than four hours to reach the transport areas off the five Normandy beaches.

There were ships all around Pop's LST blinking various signal lights. He and his men could clearly hear plane after plane flying low over them, all headed to France.

In one of the planes was Lola Will Powell Taylor's brother-in-law, a young paratrooper from Lufkin, Texas, John Taylor, in the 101<sup>st</sup> Screaming Eagles Division. He would experience bitter fighting in the hedgerow country they were jumping into, later in Operation Market Garden, the ill planned British operation in Holland, and even more so at the

"John Taylor from Lufkin, Texas, with the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne paratroopers; standing up in the back right with blackened face and wide smile." You can see a young man holding his line clip.



crossroads town of Bastogne. During the Holland operation his best friend was mortally wounded and died in John's arms.

Lola Will had attended the same elementary school as Pop in Manning, and her brother Robert Powell was in classes at Texas AMC with Pop. Robert would fight in Okinawa. In another ship full of troops was another Texas A&M graduate from Lufkin, Jack Tucker. He was an infantry officer in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division.

Two years of bitter experience on the Russian front taught German Major Werner Pluskat to trust his instincts that the racket of planes, gunfire, and bombing up and down the coast was more than just a recurring Allied raid. His artillery batteries covered half of Omaha Beach. His commander ordered him to go from his headquarters four miles from the beach to one of the bunkers on the coast to see if he could discern anything.

Paratroopers and glider borne British and American troopers dropped out of the sky to secure bridges over the Orne and Caen Canal, blow others up and organize to block German reinforcements from attacking the landings of tens of thousands of troops hours away from landing on the Normandy beaches. Nearly a thousand C-47s were used to convoy in the 82<sup>nd</sup> and 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Divisions to land behind the Normandy beaches.

Pegasus Bridge over the Caen Canal was attacked by 181 British airborne troops that came in by glider on the night of June 5. The bridge was taken in 15 minutes and a night long fight to hold the bridge from the counterattacking Germans ensued. Lieutenant Herbert Denham Brotheridge, age 28, was the killed in the initial assault after leading his platoon to silence a machine gun emplacement on the bridge. He was the first Allied serviceman killed in the D-Day invasion. He left behind a young wife and a daughter born two weeks after he was killed.

The German commander of the forces in defense of the bridge desperately tried to get authorization to call in reinforcements of a German tank unit just 12 miles away, but couldn't get it to order them to move to the bridge to clear the British troops out.

Many of the planes carrying the airborne troops were shot down by the increasing lethal German anti aircraft fire, bursting into flames before the troops on board could jump out. Most of the planes had some bullet holes in them. The planes had flown low over the channel on their approach to avoid German radar. Many of the troops jumped out at as low as four hundred feet. Some were dropped too low as the pilots dipped to avoid the enemy fire and the paratroopers died upon impact.

The Germans had flooded many French farm fields by diverting canal waters. Troopers would come in to land in water instead of on the ground. Also many fields were crossed with drainage ditches put there over the years by French farmers. Weighted down with as much as one hundred and forty pounds of equipment many men drowned.

One 101<sup>st</sup> trooper, John F. "Peepnuts" Hale, from California, jumped out with his stick of paratroopers just before his plane blew up. It had been receiving fire and was starting to burn. While going to school at home his collie dog saw him to the gate in front of the house to catch the bus to school every day. At 3:30 the dog would come to the gate to wait on him coming home soon after. This went on all through highschool. The dog continued going to the gate each afternoon after Peepnuts went into the Army, but on June 6 for the first time the collie didn't go and the family knew something was wrong. They received notice ten days later he had been killed while attacking his third German machine gun nest that day. The collie never went to the gate again.

Many troops came in on gliders pulled by planes, then released. The Germans had cut down trees around Normandy and planted the trimmed poles all over open fields as defense called asparagus. They'd connect the poles with wires. Quite a few gliders coming in for a good landing would be torn up or wrecked because of this, causing casualties.

Brigadier General Don Pratt, the 101<sup>st</sup> assistant division commander, came in on a glider that was caught up in the wires as it landed, turning it to slam into a hedgerow stopping it instantly. The general's jeep behind him in the glider's hold was propelled forward, taking his head off.

Just as light was barely breaking out over the sea, Major Pluskat, having spent a frustrating night of confused messages from his commander of possible enemy parachute landings in different places, made one last sweep across the channel with his field glasses,

as he had before, peering out of the pill box parapet, seeing nothing with each viewing. He methodically swept the glasses slowly again from left to right, then stopped right in the middle of his sweep. As the weak dawn light brightened, the channel was miraculously filling with ships of all sizes emerging out of the mist. There were small patrol boats motoring around many larger boats as if it was a normal day at sea. Pluskat phoned his commander, who asked him where all these ships were heading, "For me!" replied Pluskat. Soon many flashes were seen from the ships followed right away by massive explosions all over the immediate area and further inland. The massive bombardment violently shook the heavy bunker Pluskat was in.

A young German soldier, Herman Fronke, manning one of the bunkers on the coast told a friend, "It's impossible. There can't be that many ships in the world!" Then Allied landing craft started moving in to land their troops. Christian Haverlich, a young German in a bunker on Omaha had 12,000 rounds ready with his MG 42 machine gun and started firing as soon as he saw the Americans approaching. Six hours later he was still firing in rapid staccato bursts. One of the soldiers commented on shooting the Americans coming at them across the beach, "It was so easy."

D-day was a horrific, screaming storm of fire, shell, explosions, maiming and killing. This was especially so on Omaha Beach where young men from the United States heartland, from farms, from small towns, and cities, the cream of America, most who had never heard a shot fired in anger, were suddenly thrown into the brutal shock of killing and being killed or terribly maimed for life. The First Infantry Division spearheaded the initial assault on Omaha.

One of the first soldiers coming off the landing barges, Charles Durning, an up and coming actor and future Academy Award winner in Hollywood, had been drafted into the Army. The man going off right in front of him was killed and the man right behind him was killed. Charles went on to fight in several engagements of the Big Red One, being wounded three times, the first time by a German mine, which took him six months to recover, when he was put back in the line. It was years after before he could talk about his experiences.

This wasn't the first time the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division had fought the Germans in France. It fought in every major engagement during World War I where American troops were fighting, leaving its mark at places like Belleau Wood, leaving its dead too. Two Marine Brigades, the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> were part of the Division during the war.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> during that war captured one fourth of all the prisoners and enemy guns taken by American Expeditionary forces and won more decorations than any other American division. It fought 56 consecutive days without rest, the longest period for any American unit. It now would again fight for freedom with the blood and lives of its soldiers.

During the hell of the first day, the British, Americans, Canadians, Poles, and Free French, storm the beaches. There was Gold, Juno, Sword, Utah, and Omaha landing beaches. Gold, Juno, and Sword, were British, Canadian, and other nation's soldiers. Omaha, soon to be known as Bloody Omaha, and Utah were American landings. On Gold and Juno the Allied forces were moving inland in force within two hours. On Omaha, the German coastal guns were left fully functioning with what was supposed to have been a devastating naval and air bombardment, eliminating them. German General Rommel had increased the beach obstacles to one every two yards and doubled the number of men in the defense there. 30,000 land mines had been sowed on the Omaha beaches and obstacles.

Delayed by the weather, and attempting to avoid the landing craft as they ran in, the Allied bombers dropped 13,000 bombs in the effort to wipe out the German defense on

Omaha, but laid their ordnance too far inland, having no real effect on the German defenses. From the moment the Higgins landing boats coming from the transport ships, crammed with men and their weapons and gear, first came within range, these enemy guns opened up on them point blank in an increasing hell of fire and metal. Eighty-five German machine gun nests on Omaha were untouched and firing directly into the Americans. Twelve hundred German soldiers manned bunkers on Omaha beach armed with various sized artillery pieces and with the MG 42, the fastest shooting machine gun in the world, spitting out 1500 bullets per minute or 25 bullets per second. At 7.05 a.m., German soldier Franz Gunkel started firing his MG 42 as continuously as possible.

In the first wave some boats carrying 28 men and two crew would have only one or two left alive after being targeted by such a hail of bullets and coastal guns in the initial wave. Quite a few were swamped and sunk by the rough seas even before coming under fire. Many men would climb over the sides of the landing craft when the craft was targeted, only to founder in the water, pulled down and drowned by the weight of their packs and equipment. Most that did make it to shore were hampered further by severe sea sicknesses.

Hal Baumgarten, a 19 year old rifleman from the Bronx, New York, made it alive to the sand only to find that there was 1,000 open yards of it to cross without any cover whatsoever. Men were dead and dying right in front of him. "Hard to see body parts of people we all knew. There were men hollering for their mothers. It was a horrible scene." He stood up to run across that open expanse of hell, wondering what it would feel like when a bullet hit him. Just as he started he felt a blow right in his middle. But the blow was a bullet hitting his rifle magazine, saving his life. He went on to be wounded five times that day in various ways, and was left with a lingering guilt for years for having lived when so many of the soldiers he had known didn't.

Capt. Jim Roberts, a direct descendant of Col. George Gibson, one of George Washington's commanders at Valley Forge, related about Omaha, "There were bodies everywhere. The wounded were screaming for morphine. There was nothing I could do."

He had left Portland Naval Base in England the night before on the USS Carroll. Of the men with him on the Carroll, he said, "I couldn't help but think that by the next night, half of these guys would be dead. I hadn't thought to consider myself among them, but I guess one never does."

He and others boarded a LCVP (Landing Craft, Vehicles, and Personnel) to take them to the beach. "First we were hit with 88s (three-inch anti-aircraft guns fired point blank) about a mile out...Then came automatic weapons, machine guns and such, at about six hundred yards. It was like a summer thunderstorm; a few drops at first, then everything at once...Only this was lead. The captain of our LCVP was killed...We got hung up on a sand bar about one hundred yards out and were catching the full force of the German guns... 'This is it!' someone yelled. "We went scrambling into the water. The water was deep, deeper than we had expected...the zip and snap of sniper fire cracking in the air.. We were overloaded and top-heavy with equipment, and some of the men who had instinctively inflated their life preservers began to capsize and drown...I was terrified. To get ashore we had to hop along with the waves...The water was becoming red with blood as I neared the shore, rifle overhead, gasping for air." He thankfully had decided against inflating his life vest and made it to shore, which was littered with the bodies of his fellow soldiers.

"Running for cover across the beach I passed an Allied amphibious tank that had caught fire. I could hear the men screaming from deep inside the tank, but there wasn't a thing I

could do...with feet wet and facing intense fire I charged up a ravine only to find myself face to face with a German sniper.” He pulled his gun’s trigger, click, fouled with salt water and sand it wouldn’t fire, so he dove into a nearby fox hole. The sniper thankfully disappeared.

“Once I reached the top of the bluff, I turned to look out over the English Channel...The largest armada of battleships, cruisers, destroyers, and merchant vessels ever assembled anywhere on Earth could be seen stretching all the way to the horizon. The awesome sight of that power and force, assembled to save the world, was simply unforgettable.” He made it through the first night in a ditch to avoid snipers, artillery and mortars the Germans were throwing at them. He was assigned to make contact with a reserve unit back on the beach and came upon a soldier he recognized. The soldier was on his knees, dead, behind a sea wall, shot right through the front of his helmet. “I had met the soldier the night before the landing. We were the same rank, the same age. We were interchangeable,...like two peas in a pod; we just had different assignments...Not until then did I feel the real power of all that had happened...I could not help but think that it could have been me. It has really stuck with me all these years.”

Many units landed at the wrong location, navigation made difficult by landing areas obscured by smoke and a strong eastward moving current along the coast. Unit cohesion and coordination was shattered by the mass confusion and officers and NCOs killed or wounded in the first minutes of landing. Many units in the first wave on Omaha had 40% to 50% killed and wounded before they could get behind a sand berm or sea wall.

Col. James Earl Rudder from Eden, Texas in Concho County, east of San Angelo, commanded the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ranger Battalion as they stormed up the sheer 100 ft. cliffs of Pointe du Hoc where large German artillery guns had to be silenced before they blasted the landing parties and ships out from the shore supporting them. They scaled the cliffs only to find the guns turned out not to have been installed yet, but some of his soldiers penetrated a little further inland to find and incapacitate some large enemy guns that were to be used just for that purpose, saving thousands of American lives.

Of the 190 Rangers who actually landed, 225 had started out, but some drowned and some were killed before reaching shore an hour behind schedule, which took away the element of surprise and cost Ranger lives. They then held out against German counterattacks for two days until finally relieved. The Rangers encountered over 50% casualties in their fight. Col. Rudder himself was wounded twice in the action but kept fighting. Later he became a Major General and after that was President of Texas A&M University, having changed its name from Texas A&M College.

The assault forces from the first encountered heavier than expected resistance. Besides the heavily armed German beach bunkers almost totally remaining intact, the German 352 Infantry Division had moved in to the area just a few days before the Invasion to engage in maneuvers.

The commanders had set each landing party certain functions within certain tight time frames. Combat engineers were to blow lanes through the beach obstacles for the soldiers to make their way through. They were hindered by men using the obstacles as shelter from German gunfire, and their own numbers being blown up, wounded, and killed. One group of eight engineers were carrying a load of explosives through the surf when a German shell hit the load blowing all of them up but one. Thirty two tanks were to land in the initial waves to help eliminate the fierce German fire, but twenty seven foundered and sank with their crews

before reaching the sand. So soldiers on Omaha braved the wall of fire with their bodies and their lives.

About 10:30 a.m. General Bradley came close to calling off any further waves attempting to land on Omaha because of the carnage. But the other invasion beaches, Gold, June, Sword, and Utah were being overrun and the Allied soldiers moving inland, taking positions, capturing prisoners, paving the way for the waves coming to the beach behind them.

Lt. Bunnis, and his seventy man engineer platoon, were at the front of the first wave on Omaha. They had satchel charges and Bangalore torpedoes to blow up beach obstacles, clearing lanes for other waves of landing craft and troops, blasting out barbed wire entanglements and walls and bunkers. Many members were shot and blown up and Pop said the whole platoon was pretty messed up. Lt. Bunnis survived but Pop said he wasn't much use for the rest of the war.

Heroic actions on the part of many that day, and the sacrifice of many lives accomplished the establishment of the crucial footholds on the European continent for the fight for the liberation of its people from a terrible tyranny. Finally the men through sheer, frontal courage made their way through the explosions, bullets, and barbed wire to get onto the uplands above the beaches.

On June 6 Dad and the men on the many ships waiting to go in saw great flights of C-47s towing gliders heading to landings beyond the Normandy beaches. Crowded skyways of P-38s and P-47s were flying in both directions across the channel, either going to strafe, rocket, and bomb enemy targets or coming back to refuel, rearm and hit them again.

Dad said he could see the huge navel shells fired from the Battleship Texas in a grey streak as they sped in an arc toward targets inland. The sixteen hundred pound shells obliterated whatever they hit inland. The Texas had twenty direct hits on enemy shore bunkers that day. But the bunkers had as much as nine feet of reinforced concrete roofs and walls and the enemy soldiers inside had to be dug out with satchel charges, flame throwers and rifles fired by individual American soldiers.

The night of June 6 as Pop and his men waited on the LST just off the coast waiting to go in early morning of June 7, they watched tremendous explosions, tracer bullets flying everywhere, and bright arcing flares and shells all along the shore and inland as far as they could see.

By the end of D-Day 156,000 troops were landed in Normandy, 73,000 of those were Americans. 4,414 Allied soldiers were killed the first day, 2,499 of them Americans. Wounded numbers were much higher. At least 4,000 Germans were estimated to have died and some 2,000 French civilians.



## Chapter Forty Eight

Dad and the men in the LST – Landing Ship Tank, stepped out down the front ramp opening of the ship at 7 a.m. on June 7, D Day plus 1, to step into water in front of Omaha Beach over 200 feet from the shore sand. Pop said he would step into a trough with water up to his chest and then walk up in water up to his knees and then back into a trough. Finally he walked up on the sand, glad to get off that rolling ship.

He walked right into war. Enemy shellfire, mainly German mortars, intermediately hit the shore staging areas. Sniper fire was rampant. Dad said the shoreline in both directions in the water and on the shore was awash with dead bodies, and body parts, floating in the water and up on the shore, equipment, tanks, trucks, and weapons were smashed, blackened with fire and some still burning. Discarded gas masks lay all along with the rest of the war detritus. He heard the comforting sound of bagpipes drifting from down the beach. Pop didn't waste time there and moved inland. That night he spent in a hole in the ground as he reconnoitered the area to see where best for the placement of the engineer battalion men and equipment.

On June 7, in the teeth of vicious enemy shellfire blanketing the beach, Pop and the Indian Head boys had hit the beach at St. Laurent-sur-Mer of Omaha Beach, where the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division established its headquarters. Pre-assigned assembly areas were infected with snipers. One regiment had to blast out a company of Germans before moving in. At midnight the darkness was shattered by anti-aircraft fire as German planes flew overhead.



On the left, an LST – Landing Ship Tank – loaded trucks rolling off the type of ship Pop came in on. French farm animals killed along the Normandy roads from the shelling.

Lt. Col. Snetzer, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion executive officer was still about five miles out on a ship waiting to come in. He had seen that day a liberty ship's rudder blown off by a mine. Right after that he saw another ship burning fiercely as it went bow up to sink below the water.

On D Day plus 2 Lt. Col Snetzer's diary notes: "...air alert at 0130. Went up on deck. Could hear enemy planes but not see them. All guns opened up and filled sky with tracers...Sky absolutely lit up by number of tracers in the sky. Had another air alert and radio reported S.O.S. from a torpedoed ship in the area."

Lt. Col. Snetzer's ship moved within one mile of De Colleville sur Mer at Omaha Beach. He could see fifteen Liberty Ships aground on the beach and dozens of LCTs and LSTs high up on the beach. Some German artillery was still falling on the beach.

He spends the day overseeing the engineer battalion's equipment movement from the ship to various LSTs and barges to shore where it's unloaded. The beach is piled everywhere with smashed vehicles, tanks, landing craft, trucks, with many bodies still lying where they fell. "Inland the ditches along the roads are strewn with bodies of doughboys of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division.

The sight of such destruction and wholesale death gives one an awful shock, a rude jar at first. You are dazed by the frightfulness of war, of this horrible price we are paying to land here."

The American First Infantry Division was already fighting further inland. They had bypassed strong points just inland in order to gain as much of a foothold as possible and to try and link up with the other Allied beach forces. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. was ashore without its heavy weapons and artillery, but it went into action right away only a few thousand yards from the beach sands with only their rifles and carbines and grenades. The next day the rest of the snipers in the area were killed, but not before having raked the Division headquarters with enemy bullets. One sniper was even shot out of a tree just fifty yards from the Division headquarters.

Near midnight, June 8, the last infantry regiment began to unload and a staff officer reported to headquarters that the unit was ready to move to an area previously selected. He was told that the area, far in advance, had not been cleared according to plan – that it was now occupied.

"By whom?" He asked.

"By the 353<sup>rd</sup> Inf. Division.," was the reply.

“Never heard of them, sir. Who are they?”

“Germans.”

Pop was busy dodging shells, helping to organize the Engineer Battalion as various units of it moved inland, and seeing what engineering work the Division needed for its various units scrambling to organize and fight the Germans.

One 2<sup>nd</sup> Division regiment, lacking supporting weapons and communications, attacked the strongly defended town of Trevieres on June 9, which was an enemy communications center.

The town was defended by a German infantry battalion which had been ordered to fight to the last man. The town was to be attacked from three directions by units of the Division, with Division artillery pumping in shell after shell.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion went immediately into combat along with the infantry, with the engineer officers directing their men firing rifles and throwing grenades. The 1<sup>st</sup> Division held the north of the town. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. was to relieve them and push the enemy out of the south end of the town. As machine guns and mortars were landed they were drug up the beach and inland as fast as possible to use against the enemy.

As the enemy was pushed back in the area of Formigney the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion was finally organized into a whole unit.

In a few days the equipment of the whole division, including the engineer battalion's, was all ashore. The division quickly gathered itself together into the formidable fighting outfit it was. But before that the Division relieved the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division which had taken the northern part of Trevieres, 14 kilometers inland.

In the assault the Eng. Bn. played an important role in taking a town that was an important German headquarters. The Engineer Battalion fought just as infantry, spreading out with companies and then platoons maneuvering and firing. It was vicious street fighting. They had already been fired at while coming on the beach by sniper and mortar fire, but this was their first real offensive action against the enemy in liberating Europe. The 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment crossed the L'Aure River in a wide flanking movement under fire from artillery and mortars. The enemy had prepared positions and had to be dug and blasted out from basements and buildings. They fought with great tenacity, defending house by house. Without heavy weapons the going was slow. Artillery and naval fire was directed in many times. Not until the closing stages of the battle were machine guns brought up.

At one point a French two wheel cart was used to bring in ammunition and the troops carried it across the L'Aure River to the fighting in the city.

The 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry pressed forward on the 38<sup>th</sup> left flank and went on and took the town of Rubercy. The Division CP pushed forward to Formigny and set up in a barn. Several enlisted engineer men were wounded before Trevieres was in American control, but Pop didn't remember any of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Eng. Bn. men being killed in the action.



On the left, a Second Infantry Division wounded soldier captured by the German Third Para Division, and the blasted town of Trevieres Pop and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion had a direct hand in liberating.



General Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander on the left, General Bradley, Commander of First Army in the middle, and the Second Infantry Division commander, General Walter Robertson on the right, as they meet in Normandy in the Cerisy la Foret area.

The battalion took care of their wounded, resupplied and finally got in the rest of the heavy equipment such as trucks, jeeps, bridging equipment, mine detectors, many boxes of explosives, water tanks, bull dozers, and other equipment. Tech Sgt. Guy Williamson from Crockett, Texas, just down the road from Lufkin, Texas, was in charge of the four water units that supplied each infantry regiment and the headquarters people with potable water. They would draw water from streams or ponds and with a little two cycle engine force the water through filters and then treat it with chemicals to sterilize it for the troops drinking water and for cooking. They always had to be near where the troops were in every action. Besides the physical exertion of combat the anxiousness of being killed or wounded any time made mouths like cotton. Soldiers needed a steady supply of clean water to also avoid using other sources that might cause dysentery and disease, keeping them from top combat readiness or out totally.

Soon after coming in at Ver-sur Mer, between that and the next town, Pop and Captain Pettit were spending the night in beds they had found in the second floor of a solid brick farm house; and were sleeping soundly even when German artillery began exploding in the distance. It began edging closer, and soon was falling near the house they were in. Capt. Pettit woke Pop up to suggest they move down to the basement. Pop said it wasn't that much to worry about and rolled back over to sleep. About then one shell fell right at the first floor of the house, blowing out one whole side of the bottom floor. Capt. Pettit said Pop beat him down to the basement.

The German Das Reich Division, which had a lot of former Hitler Youth in its ranks, one of the divisions of the Waffen-SS, having participated in the invasion of France in 1940, and later in major battles on the Eastern Front, was transferred to France after the Battle of Kursk in the Soviet Union, committed atrocities in Normandy. They rescued German troops and ended fighting against the Free French partisans in the city of Tulle. On June 9, 1944, in reprisal for loss of some 40 German soldiers in the Tulle fighting, the SS troops hanged 99 men from the town and deported another 149 back to Germany. The division also massacred 842 French civilians in the village of Oradour-sur-Glane on 10 June 1944. SS-Sturmbannfuhrer Adolf Diekmann, commander of one of the battalions committing the massacre, claimed it was a just retaliation due to partisan activity in nearby Tulle and the kidnapping of Helmut Kample, commander of the III Battalion.

## Chapter Forty Nine

By June 12 the Engineer Battalion was all assembled. An infantry division was a largely self contained combat unit of some twenty five thousand men at full strength. It had three infantry regiments. The 2<sup>nd</sup> had the 9<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, and 38<sup>th</sup> infantry regiments. Each of these consisted of three infantry battalions, each of which battalion would be composed of as many as five line companies which would have two hundred and fifty soldiers divided into various platoons of heavy weapons platoon, and three infantry platoons. Each battalion had a headquarters company.

The Division had a Signal Photo Company, three Interrogation POW teams, the 741<sup>st</sup> Tank Battalion, the 612<sup>th</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion, the 462<sup>nd</sup> Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion, Military Intel Team, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Counterintelligence Detachment, the headquarters battalion, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion. The division also had its own artillery regiment headed by Brigadier General Hayes. Under his command Gen. Hayes had a headquarters battery and four artillery battery battalions. The artillery regiment could put some serious blasting fire on a target. It had 105mm and 155 mm pieces as well as smaller 75 mm pieces for more close in support.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion also had a headquarters company, and three engineer companies. After two years of intensive training the division and the engineer battalion were a finely honed fighting machine. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineers had mine laying and mine clearing skills, bulldozers and graders for road repair, explosives for blowing bunkers and bridges, Bailey and pontoon bridging equipment to ford any stream or river in Europe. The TNT (trinitrotoluene) explosive was in the form of little square cans that could be lashed together for larger explosions with more force. They were set off with blasting caps inserted into the can top. To set the TNT off, a blasting cap was inserted into the can of explosive. Detonation cord was then inserted into the blasting cap and the end crimped to secure the cord to the cap. Each man in the battalion was also equipped to fight just as an infantry soldier.

At first the Germans had a poor military opinion of the American soldier's fighting ability after the initial American action at Kesselring Pass in North Africa, but from the outset, they always had a serious respect for American artillery. The huge, American industrial ramp up to war production applied fully to all artillery weapons and shells. In Lufkin, Texas in Angelina County, Lufkin Foundry and Machine Company produced the chassis for the 105 mm artillery gun and also produced trainloads of artillery shell casings.

A German artillery piece might be very accurate and advanced but have fifty two moving and complicated parts. Whereas the American artillery weapon would have a total of eight parts, such as the 105 mm field artillery piece, but it could fire day and night without breaking

down. American industry turned out a never ending flood of ammunition to pound German positions in North Africa and Europe and Japanese positions in the Pacific.

The Nazis also quickly developed a serious respect for American air power. American bombers daily each carried tons of bombs to drop on Nazi Germany and occupied countries from bases in North Africa, later Italy, and from England. Also after D-Day there was the continuous daily ground strafing and fire support provided to the ground troops fighting the Germans. This continued in the Pacific with bombing Japanese positions on the enemy occupied islands and soon with massive flights of the large B-29 Superfortresses carrying bombs and incendiaries to drop on the industries and cities of Japan.

The Division itself was in good shape and moving out fast with enemy resistance broken in the immediate area. The air corps was blasting roads and communication lines of enemy ahead of the division. As they advanced the Engineer Battalion was kept busy repairing roads done by our own air corps. One Allied pilot said they were ordered when patrolling past the front lines to "hit anything that moved." This they did. This plus the huge naval shells landing left craters randomly all along the road networks. No mine fields were encountered yet.

On June 10 the first large contingent of enemy soldiers was captured. A bedraggled lot, they groveled before the Americans. South Russians with Mongoloid faces, Poles, Turkamons, and Georgians. Most had been lured from POW camps to escape that life and for better food. Another Allied unit captured a group of Koreans. Initially the Koreans had been forced to fight for the Japanese against the Soviets on the China border. They were captured and forced to fight for the Soviets against the Germans on the Eastern Front. They were captured by the Germans and forced to fight here in Normandy. What was left of them was happy to be captured by the Allies and through with fighting. Such are the vagaries of war.

Pop, as the assistant division engineer, was constantly traveling between the division headquarters and the various infantry regiments and the engineer battalion, conveying orders from the Division headquarters to the Engineer Battalion; relaying orders of the various infantry regimental commanders and General Robertson to Col. Warren and Lt. Col. Snetzer on orders to the battalion. This involved going to the front lines to convey the orders and staying there, overseeing the action, and moving around during the action to make sure they were being carried out.

Pop had a jeep and had kept his driver, Staff Sgt. Barryhill from Pennsylvania. Sgt. Barryhill carried an M-1 rifle and a .45 cal. Tommy gun, with Pop armed with a 30 cal. Carbine in the jeep plus his .45 cal. pistol sidearm, and grenades were kept at hand by both of them. They also had a tool chest that included mine and booby trap clearing tools.

On June 15, just as Capt. Pettit was overseeing the laying of mines in front of the enemy to prevent them from attacking back in a certain area, a German jumped out from a thick hedgerow, firing a burp gun at Capt. Pettit, shattering his left leg. He was evacuated and would undergo 17 different surgeries and years of recuperation. Miraculously the leg was saved but he always had a pronounced limp.

Except for the casualties on D-Day in Lt. Bunnis' platoon, Capt. Pettit was the Engineer Battalion's first casualty. The same day two other men from the battalion were wounded and one killed.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division was taking severe casualties, especially officers. The division lost four Lt. Colonels in four days, all killed. This was hedgerow country. The Romans two thousand years before encountered the same terrain of narrow roads with both sides of raised earth ten feet high topped by thick brush and trees. Such embankments surrounded each field, and American tanks couldn't penetrate them. The embankments formations in the fields was called the Bocage. The Germans had years to develop defensive fields of fire with machine guns, mortars and anti-tanks guns. Pop said some of the officers would seem to take chances to show how brave they were in unnecessarily exposing themselves to enemy fire when there really wasn't anything to be gained by doing so. It was easy enough to get killed as it was.

Pop was standing behind a truck talking to a priest when a bullet whizzed by their heads. Sniper! Pointing out where the shot came from the priest shouted, "Shoot him! Shoot him!" Pop quickly raised his rifle and shot at the source of the bullet and the German dropped out of the tree, wounded.



Map of the major combat thrust of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division from Omaha Beach through to the approach to Hill 192. For the first six weeks of the fighting the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion was used mainly as infantry in the front lines, especially in the towns of Formigny, Trevieres, Cerisy la Foret, St. Georges d'Elle, and then on Hill 192 beside the embattled town of St. Lo.



## Chapter Fifty

My Uncle Luearl Kinnaird, from the hills of Arkansas, had moved down to Lufkin, Texas in 1939 to work at the newly built papermill there, and where Mom's sister Orell was working as a secretary. They fell in love and eloped, but he was soon drafted and with just a short training period was shipped with the American forces invading North Africa. He wrote to my aunt, once getting past the censors by writing her a four page letter with O-R-A-N in small letters in the top corner of each page, telling her he was writing from Oran, Algeria.

After North Africa his unit was fighting in Normandy. He was sitting on the back of a truck with a close friend who had been through all the action with him on the two continents. Suddenly the friend slumped over as a shot rang out. A sniper had gotten his friend. Mom said Uncle Luearl went a little off for a while after that.

The whole Allied invasion of Europe was blessed by the tremendously successful Allied deception plan, Operation Fortitude. It kept the huge number of men and weapons with the German Fifteenth Army lodged at Pas de Calais and not storming down to push Pop and all the Americans, British, and Canadian forces struggling to establish themselves and start liberating Europe back into the ocean. One German commander complained bitterly about how such useful troops were sitting at the Pas de Calais, "just throwing rocks at each other."

But the German units of the German 7<sup>th</sup> Army in Normandy were well trained, well equipped and deadly. The Allies mostly controlled the air with sporadic enemy air raids, but until the Germans were dislodged, literally blown out of their dug in positions in the towns and hedgerows by the boys on the ground, no lands or peoples were freed.

As the French towns were liberated, Pop said one of the things the officers had to watch was their own men. The soldiers quickly found the cellars of most of the houses in the villages held ample wine, which they quickly liberated.

For a solid week all Pop and his fellow soldiers had to eat were chocolate bars. These were dark chocolate containing vitamins and energy and were divided into three sections that could be easily broken off. The GIs called them Dog Bars. They boiled them into a kind of hot chocolate, broke off pieces and ate them, even tried to make a stew of them. It was something they could eat quick to keep them going, but for the rest of his life Pop wouldn't eat chocolate. There was a plentiful French wine called Calvados, made from apples, that made a hot blue flame they cooked with.

As the Assistant Division Engineer it often fell to Pop to know the terrain very well as Infantry Regimental commanders would order a certain field or road to be cleared of mines or a certain field to have mines buried there to prevent Germans from attacking from that direction. Also there were hedgerows to be blown up for tanks and infantry to get through and streams to have bridges thrown across, almost always under fire from the enemy.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had its own air contingent of 4 small Piper cubs and artillery spotter craft. The observation planes were very small, one engine affairs with the pilot in front and the observer directly behind him. Pop went up in one to reconnoiter the landscape behind the beach area, to sketch its features as best he could, anything that might have a bearing on the Division's actions as it fought inland. Pop would help determine the best placement of bridges, probable enemy mine fields, enemy unit locations, and terrain features of importance.

The weather was still terrible with Pop observing a lot of terrain but the small, light craft from the first was tossed all over the place. The pilot struggled to keep the plane stable but the wind and shifting currents continued their sudden shaking of Pop's plane, causing it to suddenly sink or turn on its side or the front to pitch up and down violently. Pop soon was green to the gills. Finally the pilot made it back to the base, with Pop so glad to be on solid ground, but he got his observations done.

The fighting took place in these small French towns that had also been bombed heavily before the 2<sup>nd</sup> got to them. The whole country side, naturally perfect for defense and populated with a well dug in, well armed and trained enemy, also had to be conquered. That meant fighting for each field surrounded by high, thickly grown earthen walls and roads with the same ten foot high walls with thickets all along the top. It was vicious, deadly scary fighting.

Dad was sent out to reconnoiter an area. He had Sgt. Barryhill stop the jeep at the bottom of a small hill, got out and started looking through his binoculars, scrutinizing the hill. Suddenly a line of bullets from an MG42 hit the ground right at his feet. If the German had had the aperture a click or two different on his weapon Pop would have been cut in two. He jumped back in the jeep and they sped out of there. He reported back that the hill certainly had a hidden machine gun nest.

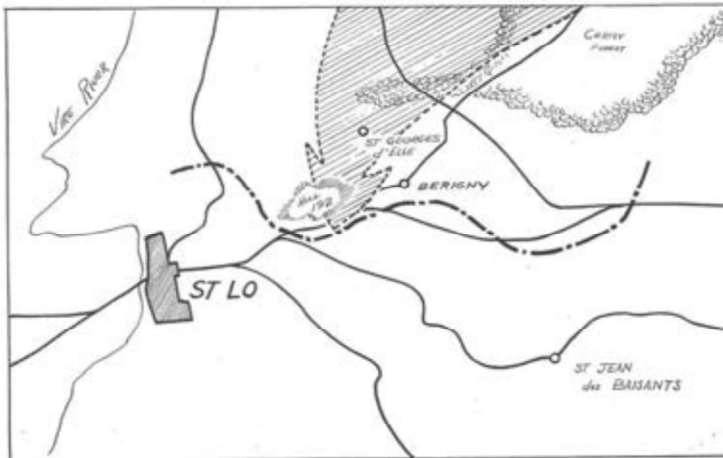
Chances are the enemy machine gun was dug in further up the hill. Had it been close in front of them it would have just mowed them both down, killing them.

They were in the Cerisy Forest, a large, thickly forested area just past Treveres. On its edge was the town of Cerisy la Foret. This was all hedgerow country with fierce firefights breaking out in every small field surrounded by sunken roads and hedgerows. Enemy snipers were rampant all through the forest.

Pop was talking with Col. Humphries, the commander of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment, who was standing about six feet away from Pop, when the colonel fell over as a shot rang out, killing him. A German sniper in a tree had hit his mark. Pop and the soldiers nearby opened up on the gunman, blasting him out of the tree, killing him. The woods were literally infected with them. A young officer from the southern U.S., Lt. Lee, was killed by a sniper in the same area.



Shortly after the village of Cerisy la Foret was liberated the villagers held a service of thanksgiving for their freedom. General Robertson, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division Commander is standing solemnly with his helmet held across his chest.



The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion continued their penetration into the Bocage country against fierce German resistance.

## Chapter Fifty One

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division was tasked with taking Hill 192. This was several miles from the beach and the highest promontory in the area. It was heavily forested with Germans dug in all over it. From its top Omaha Beach could clearly be seen and German fire still hit the beach staging area and all in between. The Germans had heavy artillery dug in on its opposite side to where the American fire couldn't directly aim on it. The 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division had bypassed it and the 2<sup>nd</sup> had to take it on. The Germans determined to hold it because they could fire down on the Americans to their sides and to their front all the way to the beach with its massive influx of Allied men and material.

A long, broad, steeply sloping approach on the lower part of 192 was full of thick trees and bushes. It had hedgerows all up its length. Bushy, overgrown, earthen walls surrounding small fields. The Germans used these with deadly effectiveness as they did all over Normandy.

On the approaches to Hill 192 however the small German fortified town of St. George d'Elle was fought over with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and the enemy pushing each other back and forth until the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division prevailed. Enemy artillery, explosive trip wires, mortar fire, and anti-personnel devices, plus Germans in hidden foxholes made the town a death trap. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineers during this time were busy laying mines in front of the Division's positions to fortify them against a counterattack by the Germans until the Division could go on the offensive again.



*St. George d'Elle changed hands many times.*



*German foxhole, St. George d'Elle*

The Germans for months had been fortifying Hill 192 with foxholes, machine gun nests, and expertly camouflaged observation points. Every crossing and road in the vicinity had been zeroed in by enemy artillery emplaced on the rear slope. German camouflage suits blended in so well with the soft green foliage that one Nazi sniper remained in a tree 150 yards from American lines an entire day before he was located and killed. Also the Germans used smokeless gunpowder that made it harder to see from where they were shooting.

Here T/Sgt Frank Kviatek, an army veteran of 27 years used a bolt action Springfield with telescopic sights to account for 21 Germans in Normandy, mostly snipers. His goal was 25 for each of two brothers killed in Italy. Later wounded, he returned after recovering to boost his total to 36.

Opposing forces were so close in the hedgerow battles approaching the hill that infantrymen used abandoned innertubes for slingshots to propel hand grenades.

Patrols were being sent out to determine the size and placement of the German forces holding 192. The men would skirt cautiously around the field corners, peering over the hedgerows and working their way through them. The soldiers had to also fight through heavy rain and wind with one of the worst storms in the area hitting on June 15, and the weather continued lousy for days afterward. The Mulberries, the artificial ports set up off Omaha beach, were almost totally wrecked but hastily put back into full service in a matter of days.

Some men were killed or maimed as they stepped on mines. Others tripped wires, setting off Bouncing Bettys, while other men were killed or wounded by enemy soldiers that lay in wait in concealed and camouflaged bunkers and holes within the hedgerows. Sometimes the American patrols at night would set off a trip wire that would trigger a sudden flare that popped up, illuminating them brightly for the German gunners opening fire on them.

The Bouncing Bettys were canned charges that popped up about waist high and exploded, sending steel balls in every direction, lethal for over thirty feet. The patrols told the commanders what they needed to know about some of the obstacles for taking the hill. Knowledge at terrible cost.

The engineers were tasked to clear paths for the infantry, and even the assistant division engineer was directly involved. Pop and other engineer members were clearing mines on the hill approaches. He had a line about half the normal length to blow a mine in place. But speed was crucial and after he carefully hooked it on the mine he backed off and blew it. The blast concussion hit inside his whole body, especially his head, with a severe ringing in his ears for a day and a half.

The engineers also improvised, making three prong metals claws on the end of a rope they would throw and pull through the brush, setting off trip wires and blowing the vicious Bounding Betties before more men were hurt. Pop carried one such line with claws in his jeep as part of his tool box.

The infantry companies then attacked up the hill, advancing quite a bit but were then driven back down the hill by a determined German counterattack.

On June 16, a Friday, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer battalion is attached to the 38<sup>th</sup> Inf. Regiment to act as infantry to relieve the 38<sup>th</sup>'s 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn. which suffered heavily in attacking through the heavy enemy defenses contesting every foot in the hedgerows, and was holding its position by the skin of its teeth with its companies depleted to half their strength. The engineer battalion detrucked at 2200 and began moving forward in the dark along sunken roads on

foot, carrying their rifles, machine guns, bazookas, BARs, hand grenades, extra bandoleers of ammo. Stormy weather continued.

Around midnight, the Eng Bn. made contact with the badly depleted infantry companies I, K, and L. The Engineer Battalion reorganized into different positions to attack up the hill with A Company holding the left and B and C launching up the hill. Three infantry companies were in reserve to reorganize and refit. All day the enemy was driven back by the engineer soldiers advancing and firing, throwing grenades at the Germans in bunkers and behind trees, supported by Bn. mortar fire, BARs, and belt fed machine guns.

The Germans fired down on the advancing Americans and the original line lost the night before by the infantry was reached about  $\frac{3}{4}$  way up the hill and pushed slightly passed by the engineer companies, with the Eng. Bn. digging in beyond it. The Eng. Bn. commander, Col. Warren was slightly wounded and evacuated all the way to England. Fourteen men of the Eng Bn. were killed, two officers wounded, and 29 men were wounded in co's B and C. The Bn. dug in. Dad spent the night hugging the ground with enemy mortars and artillery exploding around them.

The Germans mounted "minor" counter attacks all night advancing on the American positions, throwing potato masher grenades, and firing into the American lines. The German grenades and mortars exploded with terrific force and white, yellow, and red flashes in the night.

Right at dark, Dad and some soldiers were moving amongst some hedgerows up the Hill when enemy mortar shells began falling close all around. There wasn't a ditch or trench for them to get into for cover. Just as they started to hit the ground one landed right beside them, blasting shrapnel everywhere. One of the soldiers didn't move. They called for the medic, but there was nothing to be done. The man was dead. They couldn't move from their spot with all the enemy shells landing right around them as the Earth shook violently with each explosion, any one of which might land right on them. The barrage lasted through the night as they lay beside the dead man until the early morning when the barrage let up and they moved on, assuming the graves registration units would take the guy's body.

For the Germans Hill 192 had to be held. From its top the sweep of Omaha Beach could be seen and sighted for the German artillery continuing to fire on the Americans landing. Hill 192 had to be taken to stop the German artillery killing Americans. The Germans would crawl down the hill through the brush in the night a few at a time, raising up to fire at the Americans, dropping mortars where they weren't directly attacking. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. men fired back with everything they had, blasting through the night with rifles, machine guns, BARs, and pistols, repelling all the attacks. Men on both sides took hits, were wounded and killed. Fighting just as line infantry Lt. Col. Snetzer noted in his diary, "The infantry are really the Queen of battle!"

From Lt. Col. Snetzer's diary "It is a hell of an existence, lying in a slit trench trying to save your hide." Dad would be walking or crawling back and forth between the Eng Bn positions and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. Hq off the hill, reporting situations and bringing back orders and trying not to get wounded or killed. During the night, when they could, Pop and Sgt. Barryhill would be down in a slit trench they found or one they would dig themselves.

The next day the 2<sup>nd</sup> Eng. Bn. held their positions all day and at 1900 began infiltrating engineer companies to either flank and one to the rear while rebuilt Infantry companies took over the center of the line. The rebuilt infantry companies were rebuilt from raw recruits fresh in from the states. These men would sometimes have only as little as six weeks basic

training and then shipped across to be put into the line to replace an infantryman who had been wounded or killed. Sometimes the surviving veterans wouldn't learn their names before the new guys were wounded or killed and got to where they didn't want to know their names.

The next day, June 19, they continued holding their dug in positions with miserable, cold rain all day. Lt. Col. Snetzer's diary. "No blankets, no raincoats, just mud." C Company was moved and placed directly under Division to place road blocks on any approaches to keep the Germans from flanking the Division men in the lines.

Col. Warren before evacuation had mentioned to Lt. Leper, a platoon leader in Co. A that his area was too trashy. So Lt. Leper was out gathering up spent gear and trash thrown down in the area. This was June 20<sup>th</sup>. A heavy mortar barrage hit the company between 1800 and 2300. Lt. Leper was killed, exposed as he was in the open. Lt. Wright was also killed. Pop said Lt. Leper was just the finest person.

Capt. Valentino had a mortar land a few feet in front of him. A piece of shrapnel struck right between his eyes making a deep gash at the top of his nose bridge, spewing blood everywhere. Capt. Frank Prassel and others rushed over to him but he quickly told them, "I'm alright! I'm alright!" But he was evacuated to England as the wound was more than a gash. There were 16 other casualties. B Co. had none.

The next day was rain, mud, and cold with moderate casualties. June 23 Capt. Huthnance and another man were killed by mortar fire. Co. A and Bn. headquarters were detached from the 38<sup>th</sup> Regiment and moved to cross roads Hte Litte in Cerisy la Foret. B Co. continued in the line on Hill 192 as infantry. Pop said the German machine guns sounded like cloth being torn. The MG42 German gun had a rate of fire about 1500 rounds per minute. I thought how terrible it is that men should be in the position of knowing what the sounds of guns trying to kill them sound like.

The next day the 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. continued holding the line on Hill 192. There was the same mud, cold, rain, and mortar explosions in their sector with more casualties. The opposing German 3<sup>rd</sup> Parachute Div. was giving the Americans hell. There was no advancing up the Hill during these days of constant fighting and shelling with the Germans mounting an all out aggressive action to hold the hill. C Co. relieved B Co. at dusk. The weather was raining most of the days and nights making the ground all mud. One got filthy and stayed that way.

During the fighting Cols. Fuller, Elliot, and General Martin are all relieved since the Div. has been in combat. Col. Elliot, General Robertson felt hadn't been aggressive enough apparently. Col. Elliot had tried using tactics and maneuver to accomplish his mission and save lives. Col. Zwicker replaced Col. Elliott as Zwicker was more of a charge the enemy type. Pop said Col. Elliot was a fine man and officer.

The Division remains in place, but the Germans still hold Hill 192. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Eng. Bn. has mostly pulled off the Hill as the infantry units mostly relieved it, and is training with tank teams to blow paths through the hedgerows. C Co. is still in the line on the Hill as infantry. The engineers place TNT charges against the hedgerow earthen berm thicket, blowing a hole in it for the tank to charge through.

A sergeant in the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division came up with the solution. He welded pieces of angle iron from the German beach obstacles onto the front of Sherman tank. This enabled the tank to slice through the hedgerow. The order was put out to outfit tanks this way.

News is received that Cherbourg has fallen to the 4<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 79<sup>th</sup> Divisions on June 28.

On July 4, Lt. Col. Snetzer visits the city to find it had been extremely well fortified all around the city and with great heavy pillboxes facing the sea.





An American mortar squad inside a hedgerow fires at German positions on Hill 192

C Co. is finally relieved off Hill 192 on the 4<sup>th</sup>. Col. Warren returns and assumes command of the Battalion on July 9<sup>th</sup> as it waits the order for a coordinated attack of Hill 192. The whole Army is standing in place building up strength. From Col. Snetzer's diary, "The engineers were busy on road maintenance and putting in shower points as well as training in assault operations."

On July 11 the full assault of Hill 192 begins. A terrific artillery barrage opened up at 0500. The Division artillery fired 25,000 shells at the enemy positions as the attack advanced through the Hill's heavily defended hedgerows. The initial barrage lasted an hour. Four battalions of the Division's artillery plus four attached artillery battalions laid on rounds landing just in front of American positions. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division infantrymen and tanks started up the hill in a full attack. The Germans emerged from their deeply dug in bunkers all over the hedgerows, dazed but firing everything they had at the Americans.

Two tanks are blown up soon in a terrific explosion by enemy fire. The engineers advance with the infantry and tanks, blowing holes in the hedgerows to allow the tanks to attack through.

At 1030 three German 88 shells land close to Lt. Col. Snetzer and Capt. Frank Prassel. They are both wounded and taken to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Evacuation Hospital near Le Molay.

After a continuous assault of men firing M-1s, BARs, machine guns, mortars and artillery, along with men being shot and blown up and dying on both sides, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division finally threw the Germans off Hill 192. Many good men died taking the hill so it wouldn't be used to continue shelling the American controlled beach and troops coming inland.

Just the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion alone had 155 casualties, the Battalion Commander, Executive Officer, Operations Officer, Three Company Commanders, three Platoon Commanders, and 146 enlisted men. The German 9<sup>th</sup> Parachute Regiment defending the hill was virtually wiped out.

The only way any of Pop's 2<sup>nd</sup> Division soldiers got to leave combat before the war in Europe was ended, was if they were wounded severely enough to no longer be able to fight, or killed and no one knew how long the war would last or when or if it would be for sure won. There were around 2,700 infantry riflemen in the company squads in an infantry division out of 25,000 total soldiers. In the two attacks on Hill 192 the Division lost some 1,600 of these riflemen killed and wounded. They were filled in by new replacements and those returning from hospitals.

After the initial major assault in June, the Division had regrouped and attacked up against the dug-in Germans on the front of Hill 192 and then the back down the long, heavily wooded slope of the Hill in July to finally take it.

The outstanding success of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division on Hill 192 paved the way for the 29 Infantry Division to start attacking the German held crossroads city of St. Lo, just to the east of Hill 192. It was fully occupied only after 3,000 Americans died taking it and crucial in breaking out in Normancy. Due to the heavy shelling in support of the American assault, both from Army artillery, the huge Navy guns, and house to house fighting, the town was almost leveled.

After Hill 192 was finally taken at such cost, Pop received a letter from the editor of the Angelina County News. The lady editor of the paper that was published in Huntington asked if he would write her a letter about his experiences so far in the war and that she would publish it in the News. Here he describes a firsthand account far better than this chronicler. *Somewhere in France, 5 July 1944*

*Dear Mrs. Cloud,*

*This war is a grim, horrible business. I have seen sights I did not think possible. Death is so common place, life is so cheap, agony and suffering so ever present, that one is numbed by it all, and only the loss of your very close friends affect you. It is nothing to eat and sleep with the body of a fallen soldier who died beside you.*

*The news accounts seem to have indicated the landing on the beaches were easy – I can paint a far different picture on our beach. Never could I have conceived in my wildest imagination, the complete destruction, ruin, chaos and death that littered our beach for miles. Landing craft and invasion ships lay smashed on the beach or drunkenly askew high and dry at low tide, their sides with great gaping holes, rusted and charred from the fierce fires recently burned within them, having served their purpose as a crematorium for the poor devils within.*

*Shattered and tangled wreckage, barely recognizable as tanks, trucks and jeeps – the finest military equipment in the world – covered every inch of beach, partially out of the water, partially submerged, bulldozers and guns overturned and smashed from the mines and shell fire as they came ashore. The dead lay in grotesque shapes where they had fallen, now half covered by the shifting sands, as revealed each time by the outgoing tide. The gruesome sight of legs and arms without bodies floating by or sticking out of the sand; the pitiful sight of personal belongings, the snapshots of mothers, wives and sweethearts; letters, billfolds, - all littering the sand at the high water mark; equipment, smashed radios, rifles, mess kits, blankets, machine guns – enough to equip an army – washed ashore; the inadequate plain white stakes, each with a dog tag attached, already marked the start of a beach side cemetery for the assaulting troops. It was a grim site – and so horribly real.*

*There is a side less horrible and it is that side which enables us to go on. If we did not grow accustomed to the horror of war and instead, enjoy the lovely apple orchards and beautiful country side, we would all probably crack under the strain. Some who have not been able to adjust themselves have cracked; the rest of us are going on looking at the nicer things. Right now we are bivouacked in a lovely orchard. The sky is a beautiful blue above, the grass an emerald green underfoot; fat nice looking milk cows are grazing near us. It is a lovely scene. The war and death seem like a bad dream – only one seldom wakes up!*

*The French people are very courteous to us and offer us wine and flowers. I sometimes wonder if we are liberating or obliterating these poor people by the looks of their towns and*

homes, which are just rubble after we pass. The fields are full of bloated remains of dead cattle, horses and pigs; shell battered trees and hundreds of holes where we live and fight, yet they go about their daily work as if nothing was happening.

We are not a pretty bunch these days – grimy, dirty, stinking. I haven't had my clothes off since boarding the invasion ship in England. I have slept every night in France in a slit trench, part of the time covered with dust, part of the time wet with mud. I have lain in my trench and watched a pyrotechnic display at night which would be the most beautiful in the world on a Fourth of July – the sky lined with the shooting streaks of a flame, a sight to behold - and to fear. I have given up hope of ever again having dry socks, clean hands, mud out of my hair, a shirt that is not truly black to the collar; still it isn't too bad. One gets just so dirty; everyone else is the same way, and you never have to worry about trying to keep clean at all.

It is far, indeed, from the lush green fields of Normandy to the sun bathed pines of Angelina County, yet our thoughts jump back over the miles at the slightest provocation. . The parties at Mrs. Stewart's basketball games, picnics, are the topics of many a foxhole bull session.

But as it has always been said, "Hope springs eternal," and we are all looking forward to the march through Paris, and finally to our last invasion, completely equipped with a pocket guide to America.

Best Regards,

/s/ Robert

P.S. It's far from being quiet on the Western front.



left:  
German POWs  
taken during  
the battle for  
Hill 192.

Middle: tank  
with hedgerow  
busting blades;  
right: medium

tank carrying  
explosives to blast hedgerows hit by enemy fire.



Left: gap blown through hedgerow for tank advance, Right: tank at hedgerow firing position.



A German Fallschirmjäger prepares ammunition for several shoulder-fired bazooka antitank weapons shown to his left. An assortment of other weapons is also visible in this image. Some were captured American weapons probably acquired after the first attack in June.



A German Fallschirmjäger MG42 machine-gun team, in their distinctive helmets and camouflage smocks, prepare for an American attack in Normandy. Hill 192 was defended by numerous machine-gun positions of the 3rd Fallschirmjäger Division.



An American soldier carried into an aid station behind the lines on Hill 192



A German Paratrooper with his model 24 stick grenade, often called a potato masher, on Hill 192

## Chapter Fifty Two

On July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1944 Don Hackenberry, was a 19 year old co-pilot, from Williamsport, Pennsylvania, home of Little League Baseball, with the U.S. Army Air Corps 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force out of Italy. While growing up he had known the founder of Little League baseball, Carl Stoltz, there in Williamsport. Don's future father-in-law was a doughboy in World War I and was wounded, being shot through the shoulder in that terrible, trench warfare. The rest of his life he could never raise his right arm above the level of his shoulder, but it never stopped him from working.

Don's B-17 crew was typical of most American crews across the spectrum. The bombardier, named Jim Crow, was from Pocatello, Idaho, the engineer was from Oklahoma, another crew member was from Chicago, one from New York, and another from North Carolina, ten crew members in all. They made many bombing runs, including the fifth raid on the heavily Nazi defended oil fields and refineries at Ploesti, Romania.

On one daylight bombing mission they were part of a bomber group attacking a German oil refinery in Vienna, Austria from a height of 25,000 feet. They referred to Vienna as Little B for Little Berlin because it was always a dangerous mission. The city held important enemy refineries and an ME109 German fighter factory. Enemy flak was heavy. Don's B-17 had had to circle back over the target with another squadron coming behind the one they started off with as they had gotten behind. They had just released their bomb load when an aerial explosion blew out the two engines on their right wing. They couldn't keep up with the formation as it made the long flight back to Foggia, their base in southern Italy; and gradually lost altitude, worrying all the time about being a sitting duck getting jumped by German fighters. They had to fly with their working engines on the left wing down and the right wing up so as to keep the plane stable. Finally he and the pilot made a crash landing in a corn field in Yugoslavia. The farmer plowing there in the field didn't even look up as they crashed.

Miraculously all 10 of the crew lived through the crash. Nearby they saw a young boy looking through a cemetery. They approached him and found he spoke some English, and the grave he was looking for was that of his parents, who had been killed by the Nazis. The boy helped them get started back. They spent 16 days escaping through the countryside, living on soup provided by sympathetic civilians: they made it back to their base. As soon as he made it back Don found that he had been put back on the duty roster for more missions. His squadron was short of pilots. He lived through a total of fifty combat missions. Dad knew him later in life.

Davis McKenzie, a man from Lufkin who spent years in the Lufkin Noon Lions later with Pop, flew 35 missions over Germany with the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force. He made it home, but so many didn't. On August 17, 1943, 230 USAAF bombers from the Eight Air Force, launched missions against the ball bearing factories in Schweinfurt and another 146 against the aircraft factories in Regensburg. Of this force, 60 were lost before returning to base in England, and another 87 had to be scrapped due to irreparable damage.

The second raid on Schweinfurt on October 14, 1943 remembered as "Black Thursday" of the 291 aircraft on the mission, 60 were lost outright, with a further 17 damaged beyond repair. With ten men in each B-17, this meant 600 men were either killed, wounded or

captured on just this one raid. Daylight raids into Germany were cancelled for a time to rebuild the forces and assess the strategy.

A Texas AMC '42 classmate of Pop's from Lufkin, John Booker, flew B-17s from England in raids against Germany. He was shot down three times. One time he crash landed in England. The second time he crash landed in the Channel, and the third time he forced landed in Holland only to be captured and spend the next 18 months as a prisoner of the Germans until liberation.

Jack Worthington, from St. Louis, flew 56 combat missions in B-24 bombers in North Africa and later in the Fifteenth Army Air Corp out of Italy. When Rommel made his retreat after the Battle of El Alamein in North Africa, Jack and his crew flew ahead of the British forces in bombing the retreating German army. He was a radio man and gunner. An ME 109 German fighter attacked them while they were on a bombing run. Jack said it sound like a ratcheting noise as the bullets torn through their fuselage. They were shot down between the German and British lines, with one seriously wounded. Jack was unhurt. They made it back in a day and a half to British lines and were inducted into the Better Late Than Never Club. A week after making it back, one morning he was walking to the latrine, hung over from celebrating the night before, stepped on a rock and broke his ankle.

One German pilot, his plane shot up and bailing out over Holland, before pulling his chute, while passing the British pilot in the slip stream, poised his body at full attention and saluted the Allied pilot as he flew pass. The British pilot said he could clearly see the German's blue flying suit, his black flying boots, and the white scarf streaming in the wind at his neck.

Even with the continuous Allied bombing raids German production rose higher to peak in mid-1943. This was due to massive efforts by German people and its industry, the brutal drive of forced slave labor of millions of people from Germany and other countries, and spreading out production and putting some of it underground.

However, in late 1943 the Allied bombing campaign continued picking up its actions also to increasing devastation on the German war machine, to include both German industry and its German citizens, citizen workers and civic infrastructure. Just two examples are the campaign on the port and industrial city of Hamburg and the so called Big Week Operation. Hamburg's shipyards, U-boat pens, and the Hamburg-Harburg area oil refineries and factories were attacked throughout the war. The first raid occurred on 17/18 May 1940 when 48 British Hamdens attacked Hamburg oil installations.

The Operation Gomorrah bombing campaign on Hamburg, which began on 24 July 1943 lasted 8 days and 7 nights, was at the time the heaviest assault in the history of aerial warfare. Hamburg had been periodically bombed since the night of 17/18 May 1940 up to this point. Now the RAF switched from a five month bombing campaign on German's Ruhr industrial region, along with the USAAF Eight Air Force out of Britain, targeting specifically Hamburg's war and industrial production. An early form of metal chaff, code named "Window" used for the first time, successfully clouding German radar, allowing much greater bombing effectiveness, and lower Allied losses. The RAF also included Royal Canadian, Australian, and Polish Squadrons.

During the week of intensive bombing approximately 3,000 aircraft were deployed, 9,000 tons of bombs were dropped on Hamburg, and by German figures 183 large factories were destroyed out of 524, 4,118 smaller factories out of 9,068 and 214,350 dwellings out of 414,500. Other losses included damage or destruction to 580 industrial concerns and armaments works. Local transport systems were completely destroyed. During the bombing one of the largest firestorms by the RAF and USAAF was raised in Hamburg on the night of

27 July when it was attacked by 787 RAF bombers - 74 Wellingtons, 116 Stirlings, 244 Halifaxes and 353 Lancasters. A tornado of fire reached 460 meters (1,500 feet) into the sky, creating winds of 240 kilometers (150 mph), and reaching temperatures of 800 Celsius (1,470 F), incinerating more than 21 sq. kilometers (8 sq. mi.) of the city. Asphalt streets burst into flame, and fuel oil from ships, barges and storage tanks spilled into the canals and harbor, causing them to ignite. Weeks of little rain and the initial bombing had destroyed key infrastructure and communications, preventing effective fire suppression. "Some people who tried to walk along, they were pulled in by the fire, they all of the sudden disappeared right in front of you... You have to save yourself or try to get as far away from the fire, because the draught pulls you in." Ursula Gray (1974).

The majority of the casualties in Hamburg occurred during this time. At the start of this week of bombing 40,000 firemen were available to combat the fires caused by the bombing, even bringing over firemen from Hanover. Hanover was then bombed, causing uncontrolled fires there. When the July 27 firestorm erupted, the Hanover firemen had gone back to that city. The massive hit overwhelmed the city.

Operation Gomorrah killed 42,600 people, left 37,000 wounded and caused one million German civilians to leave the city, including many essential industrial and armaments workers.

In a February 18, 1943 speech to a massive rally in Germany Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels, in an exhortation to the German people to shore up popular support in Germany as the military situation deteriorated, called for "Total War". They got it.

Hamburg never recovered to full production, only doing so by maximum efforts in essential armaments industries. It was hit another 69 times before the end of the war. The RAF dropped a total of 22,580 long tons of bombs on Hamburg. The USAAF figures aren't given.

"It was quite a surprise to us when the first Hamburg raid took place because you used some new device which was preventing the anti-aircraft guns to find your bombers, so you had a great success and you repeated these attacks on Hamburg several times and each time the new success was greater and the depression was larger, and I have said, in those days, in a meeting of the Air Ministry, that if you would repeat this success on four or five other German towns, then we would collapse." – Albert Speer Ministry of Armament – *The Secret War*. Hitler also echoed Speer's comment.

Lancaster over Hamburg 30/31 January 1943

Firestorm in Hamburg during Operation Gomorrah. Allied bomber over Hamburg.







Effect of 8 days and 7 nights of Allied bombing on the German city of Hamburg.

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"The Prime Minister said that we hoped to shatter twenty German cities as we had shattered Cologne, Lubeck, Dusseldorf, and so on. More and more aeroplanes and bigger and bigger bombs. M. Stalin had heard of 2-ton bombs. We had now begun to use 4-ton bombs, and this would be continued throughout the winter. If need be, as the war went on, we hoped to shatter almost every dwelling in almost every German city. " (Official transcript of the meeting at the Kremlin between Winston Churchill and Josef Stalin on Wednesday, August 12, 1942, at 7 P.M.)

The Big Week was a concerted sequence of raids by the USAAF and RAF Bomber Command from 20 to 25 February 1944 to attack the German aircraft industry to lure the Luftwaffe into battle where they could be so badly damaged that the Allies would achieve air superiority, insuring the success of the coming invasion of continental Europe. The USAAF attacked targets during the day and the RAF attacked the same targets at night. This overlapped the German Operation Steinbock, ordered by Hitler, often called the Baby Blitz, to hit southern England from January to May 1944.

The Americans flew missions, escorted by RAF fighters and the now introduced long range P-51 Mustang fighters, against airframe manufacturing and assembly plants and other targets in numerous German cities, such as Leipzig, Brunswick, Gotha, Regensburg, Schweinfurt, Augsburg, Stuttgart, and Steyr. In six days the U.S. Eight Air Force in England flew more than 3,000 sorties, and the Fifteenth Air Force in Italy more than 500. Together they dropped roughly 10,000 tons of bombs. During the war America produced 12,000 B-17s and the B-17 Flying Fortress alone dropped 640,000 tons of bombs.

During Big Week the Eight Air Force lost 97 B-17s, 40 B-24s, and another 20 scrapped due to damage. The Fifteenth Air Force lost 90 bombers and RAF command lost 131 bombers during Big Week. The Luftwaffe fighters were severely depleted, with 355 aircraft lost and 100 of their pilots killed. Actual damage to German fighter aircraft production was fairly limited as their production actually peaked during 1944 due to dispersing production and reducing the production of other aircraft. The lack of skilled pilots due to attrition in the three front war, the Eastern front, the Italian front and the whole north European battle front caused the Luftwaffe to abandon its tactic of "maximum defensive effort" to daylight bombing missions in favor of hit and run intercepts. While the Jagdwaffe-German fighter force remained formidable, air superiority had passed irrevocably to the Allies.

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Filip Muller and his group at Auschwitz-Birkenau searched through clothes of those recently killed and found cash, diamonds, toothpaste, toothbrushes, glasses, pills, passports, school reports, wallets, and many other items among costly furs and winter cloaks, proof the Jews from Hungary didn't suspect their final destination was the gas chamber. The previous night 10,000 people had perished in the gas chambers of crematorium 5 alone, while bunker

5's site with its four gas chambers corpses were burnt in four pits. In crematoria 2,3, and 4 a total of five gas chambers and thirty-eight ovens worked at full speed, showing it was possible to exterminate the 440,000 Hungarian Jews and dispose of their bodies. It took many trains of 100 carriages to bring them to Birkenau killing center but only a few trucks to take their ashes to be dumped into the Vistula River.

In August 1944 the Nazis started exterminating those in the Gypsy camp. These had been sent to Auschwitz in 1943 from Germany, France, Poland, Romania, and other European countries.

As the summer waned, less transports came into Auschwitz-Birkenau. 300 prisoners were to be selected by the Kapos for a rubble clearing in an upper Silesian town damaged by bombs. They were told they would be well treated and fed for this necessary work.

The time before such a selection had been made, no one volunteered out of Filip's group so the SS selected 300 men and their bodies showed up at the ovens a few days later. This time, those selected were mostly Hungarian and Greek Jews who told the camp resistance that they were going to fight and not go like pigs to the slaughter. The next 24 hours were filled with tension as the time came on October 7 for the 300 to go. As they were being separated, the prisoners started throwing stones at the SS, who in turned fired pistols blindly into the crowd. Two SS men hurried off on bikes for reinforcement. The camp siren went off. The SS troops arrived and started machine gunning all prisoners in sight.

The prisoners inside set crematorium 4 on fire with the roof burning. The Russians took their hated chief Kapo and threw him alive into one of the ovens. The few SS men inside were killed. However with the fire spreading the prisoners were forced out into the open. They threw one of the grenades they had. It exploded among the SS soldiers firing and caused great confusion. The prisoners fought to their last cartridge against massively armed SS troops.

Filip had scrambled into the oven to hide in the large flue until midnight. He tried crawling out to the camp gate but was stopped when he saw two sentries. The next morning he mingled in with another group of working prisoners and escaped death. 450 prisoners had been killed. Some had managed to cut the wire to escape to the toward the nearby village of Rajsko, only to be rounded up by SS troops and killed. It was the largest uprising in Auschwitz.

Toward the end of November 1944 a final selection of all working prisoners out of the Sonderkommando was made. Seventy were to start demolition of the crematoriums to cover up the mass murders and cover the pits. The rest knew their fate of certain death. Among the desperate men standing there was the prisoner Dr. Patch, the most selfless and caring of doctors.

Dr. Mengele's experiments continued unabated during this time. Filip and those left knew they could be dead at any time, just as every day of every year they had been here.

Rumors spread that as the Soviets got closer the Nazis planned to kill all remaining prisoners.

## Chapter Fifty Three

In the Division's drive to the Vier River, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineers were busy removing many German Teller mines from the roads, these blew up vehicles and tanks, and abundant S-anti personnel mines from the fields along the axis of advance. Mine clearing parties at times operated as far as two miles ahead of the infantry. The engineer parties were usually under German rifle, machine gun, and mortar fire because the enemy knew with the mines cleared came Americans attacking. Pop and Sgt. Barryhill were busy conveying orders from Division Hq. and the various regimental commanders for roads and mine fields cleared and overseeing these operations to make sure they were properly carried out. Dad often joined in to blow mines, and he and Sgt. Barryhill returned fire when they were fired upon.

The rubble strewn streets of St. Georges d'Elle(which changed hands many times), and other little Norman towns were cleared and road craters filled to keep the tanks and infantry vehicles rolling forward.

On July 26, the Division made a hotly contested attack southeast of St. Lo to St. Jean des Baisants hilltop in conjunction with General Bradley's Operation COBRA to smash the enemy's strength in Normandy as American troops broke out of the Cotentin Peninsula. In the few days lull after taking Hill 192 and the costly victory of St. Lo, the Germans frantically dug multiple defenses three hedgerows deep.

The hill by St. Jean des Baisants was sixteen meters higher than Hill 192 and the Division's soldiers were under enemy observation all the way. Every field, every hedgerow to it was contested. Tanks lead the attack with TOT artillery, Time on Target, bursting over the tanks, designed to keep the Germans in their deeply prepared bunkers all in the hedgerows. The infantry followed close behind, advancing and firing in platoon and company formations, with the Germans firing fiercely back with mortars and machine guns.

Many young men and commanders turn into heroes as they led men on into the teeth of enemy fire, some getting killed, many getting wounded as they attack through hedgerows, destroying enemy machine gun nests, and artillery. The objective was taken with many casualties. One platoon at the end of the action had only six men left standing. Several officers and enlisted men were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, next highest medal to the Medal of Honor. Colonel Hirschfelder was one of those. He was awarded a second oak leaf to his DSC. He was rewarded it for inspiring his men to continue an attack in the midst of brutal enemy fire. He exposed himself to concentrated enemy mortar, artillery, and machine gun fire. He was awarded the DSC earlier when a captain of the 5<sup>th</sup> Machine Gun Battalion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Inf. Div. in World War I.

Another officer, Capt. George R. Michell, commanding Co. K of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Regiment, went ahead of his two assault platoons, killing the crew of one German gun nest with his M-1, then charged another emplacement under withering fire while emptying his clip of his Garand to silence that one. The 60 men left in his company after the German barrage stormed fortifications manned by 300 Germans, taking 40 prisoners, while killing or routing the remainder. He was awarded the DSC for his actions.

One group of 50 Germans advanced forward with hands held high in surrender only to fall down and open up with their machine guns on unwary GIs taken in by their treachery.

The tremendous quantities of supplies and ammunition contributed immeasurably to the overall breakout here and all over the Normandy front as General Bradley's breakout of operation COBRA begins in earnest. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division now turned in the direction of Brest, attacking west.

Pop carried important orders to B Company of the Engineer Battalion. He was to task them to throw a Bailey Bridge across the Vire River in order for the Division to advance, and was to supervise it all. He had trained intensively many times in directing a company of men to assemble and push a Bailey across a river. The 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division was going to use it to cross the river and attack the Germans were on the other side, who were ready to repel anyone from coming across.

The Vire River was a fast flowing natural obstacle just west of the town of St. Lo, a key cross roads which had been flattened in the vicious D-Day bombing and then additionally in the taking of the town. The Germans were on the west side of the Vire ready to contest any crossing. The river was a natural obstacle to the division's movement west to eventually try and take the large port city of Brest. Eisenhower intended to use Brest as a major supply port for the Allies once it was captured.

The engineers of A Company first started ferrying infantry over the swift flowing river in aluminum boats that held up to eleven armed men. Each boat had a twenty five horsepower motor and a kit on board that contained rubber plugs to stop up bullet holes. Supporting artillery and machine gun were firing on the Germans on the opposite bank, trying to move them back or kill them. As the boats started moving across the infantry men in the boats would fire at the opposite bank. As they got out in the river the current swept them down stream. Pop and B Company started putting across a foot bridge. They had to anchor the pontoon floats upstream to keep them from getting swept away, and mortar shells had already started falling all around them.

The infantrymen in the boats were landing downstream and were starting to work their way back along the bank to opposite from Pop and the bridge. The foot bridge was soon

completed, and some infantry made it across under enemy mortar and machine gun fire, but what was needed was putting tanks across the river.

Trucks carrying large bridge parts came up and started unloading them. Enemy mortar and machine gun fire continued hitting all around the area getting men hurt. The bridge had to be built. The foot bridge was soon functioning but enemy fire was continuing its intensity. The Americans fired artillery and mortars at the Germans in response and air power was called in to strafe and bomb the other side. Pop was directing B company and its officers and men as they worked as quickly as possible. The bridge head was set up and the men started pushing sections of the bridge out over the river, then attach other sections to create a longer connected section that would go further out over the river.

The Germans on the other side would man their mortars in breaks in the American fire on them and shells would start falling right around Pop and the men working to put the bridge across. They would run back off the partially built bridge until the fire let up a bit and then rush back out to their mission. This went back and forth several times with more American casualties. The explosions scattered dirt and shrapnel with great blasting force. When it hit the bridge itself shrapnel shot everywhere.

There was one great big Tennessee boy who could by himself literally lift and carry the rocker arm of the bridge, a kind of giant sprocket weighing three hundred and fifty hundred pounds that fit the major parts of the bridge together.

Pop was standing on the shore where the bridge began, giving orders, when a shell hit four feet from him. He could feel the shock waves of shrapnel blowing past on either side of him with something slamming his right ankle. Had he been standing less than a foot either front or back he wouldn't be here. He looked down and saw a spear of white hot shrapnel sticking through his pants and boot and well into his leg in his upper ankle. He reached down and pulled it out, burning his hand.

All the men in combat carried a belt of powdered sulfa drug packets around their waists. The powder was poured on the wound in the field to help coagulate the blood and control infection, so Dad pushed the sulfa drugs from one of his packets into the wound.

Quickly going to the aid station a short distance away, the Battalion surgeon, Dr. Schultz, started cleaning and bandaging the wound up, telling him he was eligible for a Purple Heart. Pop thought of those men he had seen dead, blown up, losing arms and legs and all they got was the Purple Heart. "Put a band aid on it, let's go!" He told the doctor. The surgeon did as directed and Pop went back out to finish directing the bridge building across the river.

The American's kept pounding the opposite shore with everything they had and Pop and Company B kept pushing the bridge across. They laid the steel treads on the bridge and completed it. Casualties mounted for both the engineers and the infantry, but the bridge was built. The 9<sup>th</sup> stormed across on tanks, personnel carriers, and by foot and started spreading out, firing and battling the enemy, joining up with the men who had been put across by the engineers on boats, further establishing the foothold and expanding it.

The bridge was left in place. As the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion built bridges across creeks and rivers throughout France and the rest of Europe, the bridges were left behind as the American forces moved rapidly on. The French people used them for years after the war.



On Left: Previous page, Bailey Bridge Pop and B Company Engineers built across Vire River under fire. Middle: Embattled town of Torigni-sur-Vire, Right: Bell once in the church steeple in St. Jean Des Baisants. The steeple was used as an observation post by the Nazis.

Pop months later, in blowing snow, would have the Bronze Star for valor pinned to his chest by General Robertson, the Division commander, for his part in the engagement under fire. The French government would award him the Croix de Guerre, its highest medal. I guess the French government thought more of his contribution than the Americans, but this was combat and valiant action by brave men was a constant for the American Army.



U.S. infantrymen passing through the rubble of the town that was once Vier, France. Vier was the town taken after Pop and B Company, under fire, got the infantry across the Vier River.

On July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1944 an assignation plot on Hitler unfolded in his Wolf's Lair military headquarters. It was the 42<sup>nd</sup> attempt on his life that had been attempted since he took over the Nazi party. This didn't include the 1923 brawl in a beer hall where in the back and forth confusion of trying to incite the army, who failed to fall in line, and the provisional leaders who also turned against this radical upstart, on November 9, the morning after, he and three thousand Nazis marched to the center of Munich to take it over and later the government in Berlin. They were met by a hundred policemen. Shots were fired. Twelve Nazis and three policemen were killed. Hitler's bodyguard took several bullets when he threw himself in front of Hitler. Hitler crawled away to hide two nights in a friends attic until arrested. He escaped all attempts on his life since then. Early on he got into the habit of varying his routine to rallies, speeches, and visits to

various units or political groups. Between the July 20<sup>th</sup> attempt on his life and the end of the war in Europe, another one million people were murdered in the Nazi death camps.

In the latest attempt, the bomb that Lt. Col. Staffenberg had set in the concrete bunker under the large oak table where they were all meeting at the Wolf's Lair field headquarters near Rastenburg, East Prussia should have finished De Furer, but after Staffenberg left on a pretense, another attendee moved the satchel holding the bomb to the other side of a thick wooden leg of the table, sparing Hitler the main force of the blast and thus his life.

In August of 1944, a Nazi policeman by the name of Karl Josef Silberbauer, arrested Anne Frank with her family and other Jews who had been in hiding in Holland. She and her parents had moved from their home in Frankfurt, Germany a short time after the Nazis took over the German government. In July 1942 after the Germans took Amsterdam, the family went into hiding in a secret apartment behind a bookcase. Though Anne's Father, Otto, had been an officer in the German Army during World War I, the family were Jews, and though the Jewish people had been persecuted for centuries in Russia and Europe, now with Hitler in power, they were to be *exterminated*.

Silberbauer, an SS-Oberscharfuehrer (senior squad leader) of Austrian origin, led Dutch police into 263 Prinsengracht Street in Amsterdam, where the eight were hiding, arrested and took them to Gestapo headquarters. They had been betrayed, and from there were sent to Auschwitz, Mauthausen, and Bergen-Belsen concentration- extermination camps. Anne was reported to have died in February 1945 in Bergen-Belsen of typhoid fever due to the horrendous circumstances she lived under. She was fifteen years old.



Only her father Otto lived to return to Holland where he discovered Anne's diary, which had been saved by his secretary. Her young girl fears, dreams, fantasies, and desires of becoming a journalist one day and getting her diary published, and her and her family's relationship with the other Jews in hiding with them; their daily caution and hopes in staying alive were all beautifully described in her diary. The Diary of a Young Girl became an international best seller, having been translated into 60 languages and remains an important historical document for all time.



## Chapter Fifty Four

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division is now fighting in the 8th Corps in Patton's Third Army instead of 5th Corps, First Army. General Patton had been kept in England until the ruse of Operation Fortitude was over with and now was brought to the continent. He was eager to get a command and get in the fight before it was over, especially since Hitler's own men had tried to do him in.

Between the July 20<sup>th</sup> assassination attempt on Hitler and the conflict's end, one million more people, men, women, and children would die in the numerous German concentration camps. One of the most noted was Auschwitz. It was started in 1939 after Poland was invaded and initially held Poles and political prisoners, but then the plan to exterminate on a mass scale Europe's Jews, Gypsies, and others was begun. Historians have estimated that one third of Germany's war effort was funded by confiscated Jewish property.

For years jack boots stomped on the landings of homes all over Germany, and in conquered nations, then the pounding on the door to have family members dragged away to often never be seen again. In Germany it had started when the Hitler and the Nazi party came to power, German citizens dragging away other German citizens who didn't fit in with the Nazi-Aryan ideal to be expelled or eliminated. But now for years it was done systematically. At least 1.1 million people were murdered at Auschwitz. The camps expanded rapidly as the Germans ended up transporting people in cattle cars from all over Europe. Treblinka, Kulmhof, Sobibor, and Belzec were just a few of the many camps. This was the enemy Pop and his fellow soldiers were risking their lives to stop. This systematic murder would continue until Pop and the Allied forces advanced on the ground to where it was happening and force an end to it.

The organized murder of Jews, Russians, homosexuals, Gypsies, the retarded, and political enemies had been known by many in the Allied commands. The Nazis had started this targeted imprisonment and murder years before the war in Europe started.

Six separate articles were published about the extermination camps in the New York Times during the course of the war. Roosevelt had been told of the murders going on in the camps. There had been some talk of maybe bombing some of the camps but it came to naught. Pop and his men weren't aware of any specifics and had heard only vague rumors about the death camps. They were busy training, and in combat just concerned with doing their duty and staying alive.

Either the day it happened, July 25, or the day after, Pop got word that the U.S. Commander of the ground forces, Lt. General Lesley James McNair had gotten killed in a friendly fire accident. The American and British bombers were pounding enemy positions just beyond the front lines. Wave after wave of bombers flew toward the targets with the wind blowing toward the American lines. The smoke clouds from continuous blasting started

coming closer to the U.S. troops and the bombers following in the wake of the ones going before started targeting the front edge of the smoke as part of the bomb run. The smoke blew closer and closer to the American lines and was soon over them. Without enough time or communication to the bombers to stop the onslaught, bombs started falling on the American troops. One surviving soldier said it was odd, he could hear the projectiles rattling on the way down. From Army History: "The ground belched, shook and spewed dirt to the sky. Scores of our troops were hit, their bodies flung from slit trenches. Doughboys were dazed and frightened ... A bomb landed squarely on McNair in a slit trench and threw his body sixty feet and mangled it beyond recognition except for the three stars on his collar." General McNair, the American commander of all ground troops in Normandy was up at the front with his troops. He and one hundred and eleven of the men were killed with many wounded.

The U.S. and British forces had launched Operation Cobra, an effort to break out of the vicious close in fighting caldron of the hedgerow country. Hundreds of U.S. and British heavy bombers would carpet bomb an area two and a half miles wide and some thirty or so miles long. The Allied forces would then storm through, hoping to catch the Germans weakened by the massive bombing attack.

After the assault across the Viers the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was in almost daily battle on the way to Brest. For the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion men it was a case of keeping roads passable for the many vehicles of the division and clearing mine fields. This was done ahead of the infantry, usually under fire from the Germans who knew as soon as the engineers cleared a path the

infantry would come charging through.

On the left: a captured German ammunition dump. On the right: 2<sup>nd</sup> Eng. Bn. Engineers building a corduroy road in one of the sunken roads of



the Bocage country.



On the left: a moment of rest in a shelled out town.

Right: Abandoned German material along a road in Normandy.

life and those of one's command daily at risk for their lives. To Pop and the rest of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division each day became a task of doing's one job and trying to stay alive in the process. It got to the point where the name of the village wasn't thought of. The villages were collections of close set buildings, narrow streets with Germans shooting from them at

every turn. In between was the Boscage, the hedgerow country, also filled with German soldiers targeting every corner land sunken road with mortars, machine guns, and artillery, making the fighting especially vicious and deadly. Raw replacements sent fresh from the states were shuttled in to fill gaps in the lines for those killed or wounded. By the end of the fighting in '45 some of the infantry line companies had as much as 400% turnover. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion had around 200% turnover in numbers due to wounded or killed soldiers.

The Engineer Battalion troops were responsible for moving with the infantry troops establishing water supply points and constructing latrines. Pop was checking on the progress of one platoon of A Company engineers. They were charged with digging a latrine at an infantry staging area, and then building supports for the men to use them, and this was no laughing matter. In a combat zone any effort to maintain sanitary conditions was necessary to keep down disease and the men as combat ready as possible.

As Pop approached the position he saw the platoon sergeant in charge of the latrine project kneeling, cowering under some bushes way behind the position. It was Staff Sergeant Bowerman. There were some occasional enemy mortars falling in the area but this was the front lines. The platoon had been forced off the position several times when the mortar fire became too intense. The rest of the platoon always went back out doing their jobs with shovels and hammers but the sergeant ordered them out there and stayed behind. Pop told him, "Get the hell back to headquarters." Any leader not directing his men and letting his men take all the risk wasn't a leader. He was putting all the burden on them. Headquarters relieved Bowerman of his command and gave him some duty around headquarters where he wouldn't do any harm.

In all the actions in attacking toward Brest, in addition to their bridge building activities, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion had the dangerous task of pulling out the hateful German Tellermine sewn in the Division's road routes. A harvest of S-mines was also gathered through the fields on the advance.

Pfc. Joseph Elwell of the Eng. Bn. won the Distinguished Service Cross while clearing a minefield and road under direct, heavy enemy rifle and machine gun fire and participating in two patrols into enemy territory. Pop and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division continued their deadly duty.

Further east on August 22, the Americans had completed a wide sweeping arc after the breakout from Normandy through Le Mans after Operation COBRA, and met up with the British who finally broke out of the Caen area to close the Falaise Pocket. Fighting continued inside the pocket until 10,000 Germans were killed and 50,000 were taken POW. General Patton pushed for the pocket to be closed by the British earlier so to trap many more Germans. When General Eisenhower visited the area of the Falaise Pocket, he said one could walk for 300 yards and step on nothing but flesh.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion's Hq after moving through all the towns toward Brest was now set up in a lovely French chateau. Cpts. Fred Valentino and Frank Prassel were back in the Bn having recovered from their wounds. Brest was a major port city for the German Navy and also harbored Nazi submarine pens for attacking Allied Atlantic shipping. It had an enemy airfield.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was now closing on Brest hedgerow by hedgerow just as it was in Normandy. Dirty, deadly, sticky fighting. The corners of a field would be hide German machine guns and mortars covering the entire field. Firing at the opposite side, attacks were

made on the run across open ground, hopefully with unit mortars softening up the German positions. There were lots of mines and booby traps to clear, hopefully finding them before they kill or seriously wound some fellow soldier.

As the 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. began to close in on the lands approaching Brest it found it is opposed by the German 2<sup>nd</sup> Parachute Division, which is reinforced by sailors and marines, and putting up a terrific resistance. Lt. Col. Snetzer called the enemy actions as "Making a regular Bataan."

Meaning the Germans were contesting every field and lane as they were slowly pushed back. The overall German Brest commander, General Von Ramcke, had 50,000 troops at his command to oppose the Americans, plus ample arms and supplies. He had orders to hold out a minimum of 90 days. On Sept 4 another Lt. Lee and two sergeants from the Eng Bn were killed by an exploding anti-personnel mine.



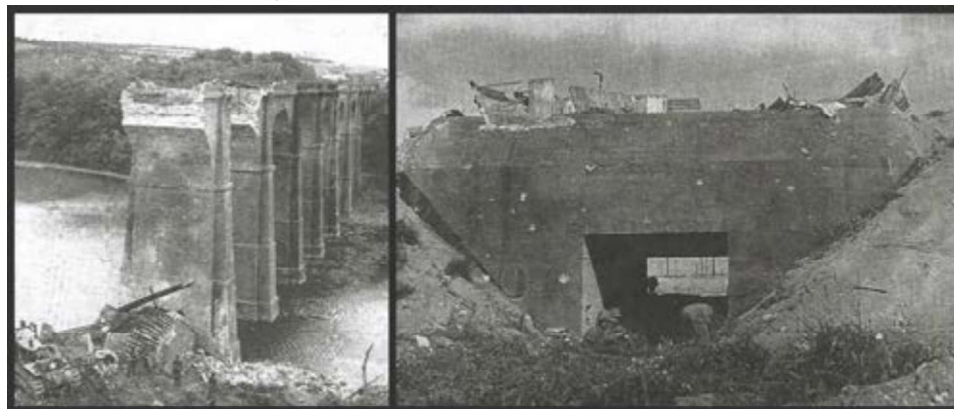
On the Breton Peninsula: Fortress Brest

On Left Bottom: Bailey Bridge built by 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn Engineers under fire at le Relecq-Kerhoun over a bridge blown by the Germans on outskirts of Brest. The engineers would sometimes step into houses to try and escape the bombardments only to be wounded or killed by booby traps left by the Nazis in the nearby homes. On Right: Nazi prisoners taken by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. on the fight toward Brest. Woman wearing Red Cross arm band holds a kitten as she walks beside a German officer.



A large bridge crossing the wide water estuary leading to the heavily enemy reinforced port of Brest was being approached by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. It was a great route to move over the waterway and attack Brest, but just as they started approaching the bridge it blew up in a tremendous explosion. The Engineer Battalion engineers soon moved in with bulldozers and graders to clear the large pile of rubble the bridge made in the estuary, hopefully to use the site as a possible route over the estuary.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineers were rushed to bulldoze the bridge rubble out of the way so a Bailey Bridge could be pushed across, and B Company of the Engineers was tasked to do this. They fitted together the bridge structure parts and pushed them out over the span as they added more and pushed them on, propelling the bridge further out. All their action was under fire from the enemy, mortars, machine guns and artillery, with the 23 Infantry Regiment poised to cross over as soon as the engineers finished the bridge. Dad was working with B Company to get the bridge across, and just as they completed the sixty foot span the 23<sup>rd</sup> soldiers rushed across, firing and spreading out on the other side. Dad heard then that Captain Jack Tucker, commander of Company C of one of the 23<sup>rd</sup>'s battalions, one of Pop's classmates from Texas A&M, and also from Lufkin, had been hit. He was shot in the left side of the chest, seriously wounded and out of the war for several months.



On Right: German bombproof shelter on edge of airfield near Brest. Now occupied by 2<sup>nd</sup> Division soldiers after the Germans were blasted out.

On Left: Germans blew the Point St. Barbe bridge from Daoulas to Brest.

The days pass with brutal battle, firing, killing, and taking of German POWs as the Division fights its way up to the outskirts of Brest where the fighting becomes house to house. The Army Air Corps mounts day long air raids on the City, strafing and bombing. The American artillery pounds the city constantly just ahead of the infantry. "The city is being utterly destroyed."

"The city is burning continuously. The Germans fight for each step, firing at the Americans from windows, rubble and doorways. 7000 prisoners are taken by September 12 but the Germans continuing fighting on furiously."

The German commander, General Ramcke, is offered an opportunity to surrender, but refuses in blunt terms. The German paratroop officers and noncoms would not hesitate to shoot those seeking to give up or surrender the fortress. Just the 29<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Divisions now are in the fight as the 8<sup>th</sup> Division is squeezed out with no room to continue attacking.

Brest is a large port city situated at the end of a peninsula. It was an old historic town with a very large, tall, thick inner wall protecting the older part of the city before one got to the port facilities. The Germans used this as a natural defense from which to fire on the approaching Americans as they did every building or wall left standing or pile of rubble.

The Daoulas Peninsula struck out into the ocean just south of Brest and contained high ground overlooking the city, which made it a prized objective for American artillery. The Germans also realized this and heavily fortified the area.

The 2nd Infantry Division assembled Task Force B to capture the peninsula. The force was built around the 38th Infantry Regiment with support from a company of Sherman tanks,



a company of tank destroyers, three battalions of artillery, and Task Force A, a cavalry and tank destroyer unit.



On 22 August Task Force B moved to hit its first objective, the heavily fortified Hill 154. The Indianheads used the tactics they had learned in the hedgerows of Normandy. The men crawled flat on their stomachs slowly and deliberately toward the bunkers using each and every bush and rock to conceal their movement. Suddenly, they leapt up and overran the German bunkers with flamethrowers and hand grenades. The surprise was so complete that one German taken prisoner said, "I knew you were coming but I couldn't do anything. I could see no one to shoot. The first American soldier I saw was the one who captured me!"

With the fall of Hill 154, German resistance on the peninsula fell apart. The Indianheads then set up Task Force X (later known as Ivory X), an artillery group consisting of 57 .50 cal machine-guns, 12 tank destroyers, and eight 40mm anti-aircraft guns. From their positions Ivory X was able to hit the Germans from behind. They kept up a hail of fire supporting the Indianheads during the assaults on Brest itself.

General Eisenhower planned to use Brest as a readymade industrial port to handle the millions of tons of supplies and equipment to support the Allied drive to free Europe. But the Germans were ready to blow the port and with the Americans pouring in artillery and air power continuously the town and port were being torn apart. Eisenhower was anxious to use it as a supply port, as he was directing an overall broad front strategy. General Patton, the area commander of the Third Army that Pop and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division were currently part of, had advocating bypassing Brest, cutting it off with a unit to keep the Germans contained, and not having to use up so many men and materials in taking it, and move on to Paris and the rest of France. General Patton felt the men and materials could be used to liberate more territory and peoples sooner. The Germans at Brest were still formidable, but already cut off by air, land, and sea.

On September 16 the troops were closing into the city center, massing around the old city wall. Direct fire from 155 mm and 76mm guns were used against the wall, blasting out terrific showers of stone. The 39<sup>th</sup> Regiment captured an impressive German naval hospital. Fighting was floor to floor with machine guns firing out from the third floor windows on our troops.

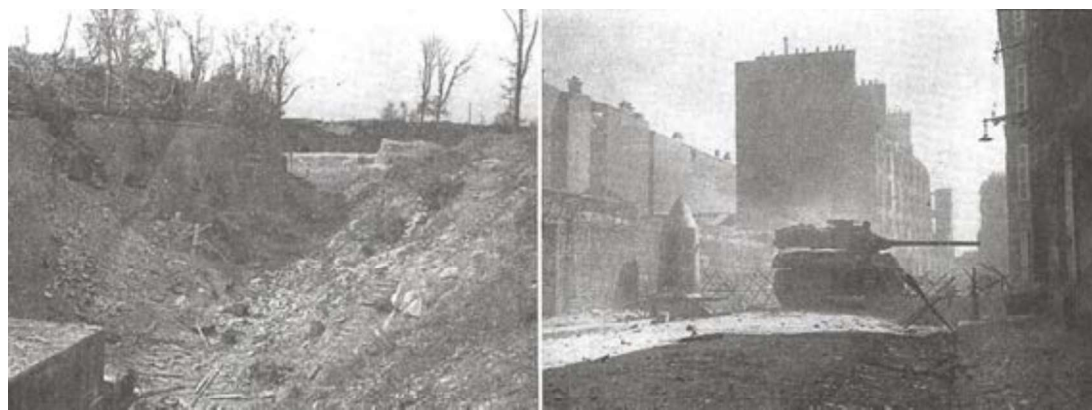
The troops found often the best way to advance on the enemy was to bore through building walls to get at him, They pushed through rubble as much as 15 ft. deep in places, and use



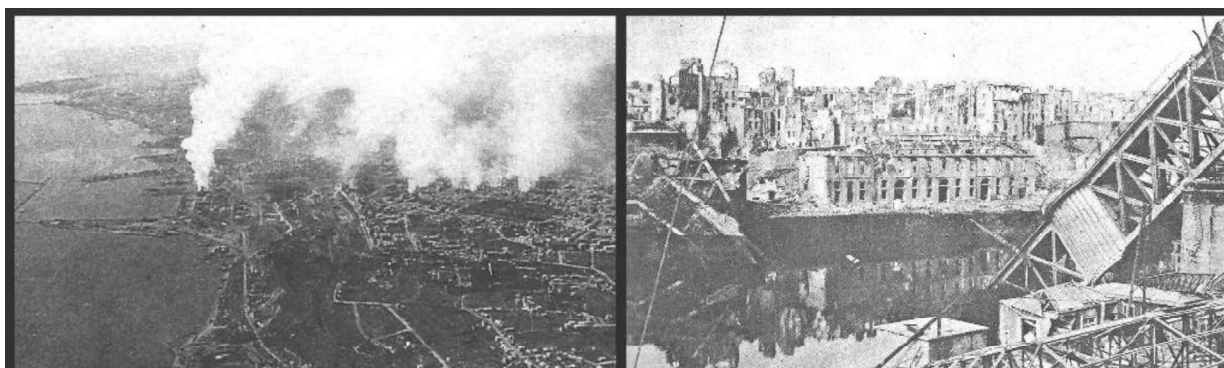
ladders to scale walls so as to fire on the enemy from above and lob grenades down on him.

Top: White Phosphorus grenades thrown, explodes to cover troops in Brest dashing across a street.

Below left and right, 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. soldiers dodging enemy fire and advancing.  
 Middle below: enemy POWs being hustled back for processing.



Left: Part of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century moat and wall the infantry and engineers had to blast through.  
 Right: 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. tank firing in the city of Brest.



Left: Brest under American bombardment. Right: Destruction of Brest port by both Allied Bombardment and German sabotage.

Front line troops began taking over apartment houses, sleeping in real beds, and liberating more wine, cognac, perfume, and toilet articles.

The inner city and port was surrounded by a centuries old moat and stone faced earth wall that was impervious to all shelling. The wall measured 60 feet across in some places – too wide for demolitions. The Germans used it to maximum defensive use. The Engineers had plans for scaling ladders and satchel charges to assist in assaulting the wall, but on September 17, under cover of darkness Lt. Col. William F. Kernan's 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. was credited for



finding a weak spot and infiltrating through, while elements of another battalion found a break in the wall along the river and got in behind the defenders, putting them in a dangerous position. Another battalion was ordered to scale the wall in support, and before the morning light could reveal the attacks.

On September 18 Brest surrendered. Pop and Lt. Col Snetzer went over the Wall that morning with supporting infantry, taking hundreds of prisoners. They were first into a pill box, with Lt. Col. Snetzer picking up a Lugar and three pairs of excellent German binoculars.

They were present in President Wilson Place, as a large square in the city was named, where the surrender took place. From Lt. Col. Snetzer's diary, "It was a dramatic moment as the immaculately clad German Officers, many with their Iron crosses, stood in the center of the horribly burned and destroyed city. ...Col. Pietzonka, Commanding Officer of the 7<sup>th</sup> Para. Regt. called his Officers around, they gave the Nazi salute, shook hands and he pinned a medal on one of his surviving 'Hauptmans'. Bn. after Bn. of Germans were led out of their deep shelters by the officers and taken over by MPs. City is utterly destroyed. All buildings left standing are completely gutted by fire." The inner city of Brest had been completely demolished by artillery and aerial bombardment. Six bulldozers were brought in, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineers working for two days and nights to open a one way loop through the rubble pile that was once a city, pushing the fallen walls of buildings into the basements to clear the streets. This enabled the thousands of German casualties to be evacuated. "The French Tricolor was hoisted and the few French left sang the Marseilles. So strangely silent in the city, no artillery passing overhead, no rifle fire. All like a ghost city."



Major General Robertson, 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. commander, and Col. Chester J. Hirshfelder, cmdr. 9<sup>th</sup> Inf. Regiment (right goggles on helmet) at Place President Wilson in center of Brest, as Col. Pietzonka (left with back to camera) cmdr. Of 7<sup>th</sup> Parachute Regiment and Sector East of Brest surrenders his forces.

The city was so destroyed, especially the port facilities, that it was never effectively used to land supplies. Until almost the end of the war the Americans supplied most of the Allied efforts directly across the beaches at Normandy, the supplies being loaded off on the artificial docks, the Mulberrys, set up out in the Channel right after D-Day; until the port of Antwerp, Belgium was captured and put into operation. As the Allies advanced, the truck supply lines, the famous so called Red Ball Express, ran day and night. Most of the drivers were black enlisted men.

About this time in London, an older man and woman were traveling on a bus at night. The woman kept counting off her fingers on one hand. "One, two, three, four, five." Soon other passengers were glancing at her with some snickers heard. She would stop and begin again and again. The snickers got louder. Finally the man with her spoke up, "Please don't make fun of my wife. You see, we had five sons, and we've lost every one of them in the war. She couldn't take it anymore. I'm taking her now to an asylum." This is one of the true faces of war.

## Chapter Fifty Five

As the Red Army approached Warsaw (July 29–30, 1944), Soviet authorities, promising aid, encouraged the Polish underground there to stage an uprising against the Germans. However, the Polish underground, known as the Home Army, was anxious because the Soviet Union had already assumed direct control of eastern Poland and had sponsored the formation of the Polish Committee of National Liberation to administer the remainder of Soviet-occupied Polish territory under Soviet control. Hoping to gain control of Warsaw before the Red Army could “liberate” it, the Home Army followed the Soviet suggestion to revolt. The Polish Home Army wanted to establish a democratic, western style, free Poland. There was also German plans of able bodied Poles for a mass “evacuation”. After five years of brutal Nazi occupation the Poles were ready to free their nation.

The Polish uprising kicked off on August 1, 1944. Commanded by General Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski, the Warsaw corps of 50,000 troops attacked the relatively weak German force on August 1 and within three days gained control of most of the city. The Germans sent in reinforcements in the form of three SS Divisions, however, and forced the Poles into a defensive position, bombarding them with air and artillery attacks for the next 63 days. The fighting was intense, often house to house. The Poles resorted to moving to different parts of Warsaw through the sewer systems. The Germans in trying to prevent this would put spools of barbed wire down the manholes in the sewers to try and block the Home Army transit around the city.

The Poles found captured a warehouse full of German uniforms. They put them on, fooling the Germans into thinking they were being attacked by their own soldiers. Several German units were eliminated in this way. Polish men and women darted out from hiding, throwing Molotov cocktails at treads of German tanks to great effect, setting them ablaze.

1,200 Polish troops fighting under a Soviet commander made it across the Vistula River to fight the Germans, but were then not supported by the Soviet Army.

During this battle for Warsaw, it is estimated some 16,000 Polish resistance fighters were killed and 6,000 badly wounded. In addition between 150,000 and 200,000 Warsaw citizens or Varsovians as they were known were killed during the fighting, mainly by execution. In the house to house fighting, any Jews found hidden by the Poles were killed by the Germans also.

In addition, the Soviet government refused to allow the western Allies to use Soviet air bases to airlift supplies to the beleaguered Poles. Stalin ordered the Soviet Army tanks to park and the Soviet troops to remain idle in place. There were many make-shift military airfields that had been formed by the Soviet air force within five minutes flying time of Warsaw, but no Soviet air forces helped the Home Army fighters against the Germans. The British made at least three low level supply drops and the Americans one, but it was way too far for effective aerial support. Most of the badly needed supplies fell onto German held areas. The Soviets were the only ones that could have helped in a very significant way.

The Home Army was forced to break into smaller units and when their supplies gave out forced to surrender on October 2. They were taken prisoner and most of the population of Warsaw was deported to camps.

Stalin's plans to get the Polish Home Army to destroy themselves in the fight for their homeland and capitol against the Germans succeeded. This complete lack of Soviet support led the operation to fail and allowed the Polish resistance to be crushed. In the elimination of the Polish Home Army, Hungarian-British author and journalist Arthur Koestler called the Soviet attitude "one of the major infamies of this war which will rank for the future historian on the same ethical level with Lidice."

When the Polish Home Army was defeated, Hitler ordered Warsaw to be razed. During the urban combat 25% of Warsaw's building were destroyed. German troops systematically leveled another 35% of the city block by block with explosives and fire. Together with the earlier damage suffered in the 1939 invasion of Poland and also during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943, over 85% of the city was destroyed by January 1945, when the Germans were finally forced from the city by the events of the Eastern Front.

During the course of the war, 20% of the total population of the nation of Poland were killed. The three and a half million Jews in Poland before the war, the largest in any European country, were reduced to three hundred thousand at its end. One estimate gives four hundred thousand, but not more.

By allowing the Germans to suppress the Warsaw Uprising, the Soviet authorities also allowed them to eliminate the main body of the military organization that supported the Polish government-in-exile in London. Consequently, when the Soviet army occupied all of Poland, there was little effective organized resistance to its establishing Soviet political and military domination over the country and imposing the communist-led Provisional Government of Poland (Jan. 1, 1945) for the next forty five years, and indeed all of the Eastern Europe.



Swearing in of Polish Home Army soldiers. The three finger salute was traditional for the Polish Army



Tadeusz Rajszcak "Maszynka" (left) and two other young soldiers from "Miotła" Battalion, 2 September 1944



Young Polish soldier



Henryk Ozarek "Henio" (left) and Tadeusz Przybyszewski "Roma" (right) from "Anna" Company of "Gustaw" Battalion in the region of Kredytowa-Królewska Street. "Henio" holds "Vis" pistol and "Roma" shoots from Błyskawica submachine gun.  
Credit: Jerzy Piorkowski (1957) Miasto Nieujarzmione



Film footage taken by Polish Underground of bodies of women and children murdered by SS troops in the Warsaw Uprising, August 1944



The Germans used massive 600 mm guns to destroy most of the rest of Warsaw. Here the Prudential building is blown down in seconds. To the right destroyed Warsaw, the Old City portion shown.







Polish resistance fighter captured after defeat. Coming out of the Warsaw sewers.



A young Polish nurse in training during the Resistance. Rlisu's Blog



Warsaw Uprising soldiers surrender to the Nazis, October 5, 1944.



Polish Resistance Fighters in action



In a propaganda picture poised by the Nazis, Polish general Tadeusz "Bor" Komorowski shakes hands with SS-Obergruppenführer Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski after the signing of the surrender of Warsaw insurgents, Warsaw insurgents, 1944. In the background on the left (wearing the cap with the badge of the German military police) - Governor of Warsaw, Ludwig Fischer. Note Bach's smile and the dire expressions of the other Germans. Few of the surrendered insurgents survived. The Nazis also leveled most of Warsaw and deported many thousands to concentration camps.



Captured German Panther tank by resistance fighters from "Zośka" Battalion under the command of Wacław Micuta, 2 August 1944

## Chapter Fifty Six

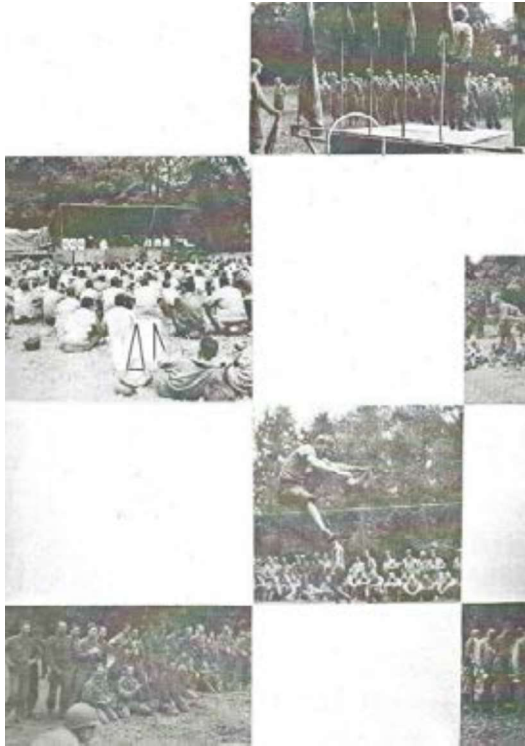
Sept 20, 1944, the Eng. Bn. finished opening up key streets of Brest and moved to assemble near Landerneau. At the Bn. chateau headquarters a huge party was had with captured liquor, wine, and cognac. Nurses attended and the Div. band played. I'm sure there were some industrial type hangovers the next morning. Pop didn't drink so he wasn't affected. Platoon leader 1st Lt. Ising of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineers, was a virtuoso on the piano and at gatherings during the week played for various parties.

Men, just having lived through many weeks of deadly combat tended to let loose a bit when the shooting finally stopped. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division had been in continuous combat against the enemy for 71 straight days, well beyond their record of continuous combat of World War I.

A subtle change was felt immediately upon the fall of Brest. With the elimination of the enemy on the peninsula the blackout could be lifted. The Division could use its lights at night for the first time since the departure from New York Harbor on October 7, 1943, almost a year of cautious darkness.

The next day was a complete shakedown of all equipment, trucks, and weapons, and Brest is placed off limits to all troops.

On September 25 the Bn. had "Organization Day." Contests, track meets, and games were held. A Week of rest in a great bivouac area was a blessing. It enabled the men to relax a bit after many deadly days and be boys again. After 71 days of continuous combat, the Bn. had 308 casualties so far in the war. 175 Replacements are fitted into the Bn. These were often ASTPs, which were young men inducted into the Army that proved to have a higher IQ than the normal recruit. They were given intense training and then put right into



the infantry line companies or combat engineer companies. The thought was they would adjust quickly and pick up what they needed to do. That was the theory anyway. As mentioned, many of the veterans got to where they didn't bother learning the new replacements names as the new guys seemed to die more easily or get wounded quicker. 108 Purple Hearts, 141 Bronze Stars, and 17 Silver Stars were awarded to various members of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Eng. Bn. is now at 658 enlisted men and 32 officers.

Activities of Organization and rest week included games, speeches, refitting, parties, and getting in new replacements.

When the week was over the Division loaded men and equipment on trucks to start moving toward Germany. Pop and the Eng. Bn. headquarters, with Col. Warren, went on ahead. The large Division truck convoy camped for the night along the road near St. Aubin. The motor convoy continued via Alencon, Montagne, La Loupe and stopped after one hundred seventy miles near Chateaufort, and were out of the hedgerow country. They traveled through great open fields with no fences and the only signs of war being bombed railroads. The civilians looked better than those in Normandy, with the "Red Ball" supply convoys rolling continuously along the roads toward the front.

Paris! Pop and his staff toured a little, seeing the Eiffel Tower, bridges over the Seine and other places. Beautifully dressed women seemed to be everywhere, with people all over waving and trading souvenirs for cigarettes.



Pop on the left with the sergeants from his Division staff, in front of the Eiffel Tower in Paris. They weren't smiling. They weren't tourists. They were soldiers heading back into combat.



“B” Company got lost going through the City and Lt. Col. Snetzer spent an hour looking for them. The Eng. Bn. got away from the City by 1800. The City was full of GIs, WACs, and government vehicles.

Units of various American divisions filled the long, wide boulevard as they marched down the Champs-Elysees and under the Arc de Triomphe. They were unsmiling, their faces grim. Most had been civilians before and would be again, but now they were marching back into combat, some would be severely wounded or maimed for life. Some would die.



American Soldiers walking on the Champs Elysees through the Arc de Triumph in Paris on the way back to the front.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division in various units got on trucks and started toward the action. Rolling through the flat fields of eastern France, across where only a couple of decades ago from the English Channel all the way to the Swiss border a war involving millions of young men fought back and forth for four long years in terrible static battles from trenches facing each other.

On Saturday September 30 the Engineer Bn. and Div. roll into rear of First Army sector at Guise, on into Belgium at Macon on to Dinant and Champion practically into Luxemburg, Houffalize and stopped long after dark in miserable cold rain at St. Vith, two miles from the German border.

People all along the route threw apples, pears, gave them eggs, bottles of beer, pies, and cookies and flowers as they rolled along. Everyone waved and cheered to them. At LaRoche the people practically mobbed them with kindness; until they reached St. Vith. There the Belgian people spoke German. The Division went into a muddy bivouac that was cold and wet. Paris and all the beautiful country and people on the way were left behind.

On October 1 the 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. is to relieve the 4<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. and part of the 28<sup>th</sup> who have punched a hole in the Siegfried Line and hold some of the concrete bunkers. The 2<sup>nd</sup> took over along a 27 mile front in the Schnee Eifel with two small American salient's extending

into Germany. The miserable cold rain continues with some of the infantry on trains yet to arrive.



Captured German gun emplacement in the Schnee Eifel

The next few days the engineers are tasked with working on roads with continual bad weather plaguing their area. Col. Snetzer writes, "The Siegfried Line's concrete forts are awesome in their thickness. There are no young men in the area, all are in the German Army. "A" Company engineers are living with civilians in Auw, Germany. C doing the same in Schonberg, Belgium. The German civilians had no choice. B Company is in the woods near there."



Pop looking into a captured German bunker in the Schnee Eifel forest

Pop standing in front of a camouflage screen to keep the Germans from seeing 2<sup>nd</sup> Division vehicles and firing on them.



The Bn. opened up a quarry with a power shovel and are rocking all the roads in the area. The piano playing engineer soldier, Ising, played in one of the area houses while a bunch of the officers and men drank beer and sang.

Col. Snetzer continued, "October 10 toured an underground German machine shop over seven hundred meters long. The day before C Company had two men killed installing a minefield. B Co. lost one killed and ten wounded three days previously from enemy shellfire. Road maintenance continues as a big job and the rain continues day after day."

The roads are quagmires as the weather is a constant drizzle broken only by heavier rains. Where the land is too marshy log roads are built out of the ample, tall pine forests.



More shelters are being built for the men on the front lines.

Digging in for the winter.

## Chapter Fifty Seven

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Arriving at Auschwitz II at the ramp at Birkenau, May/June 1944. I feel for each person arriving there, especially the mother clutching her baby in the foreground and the child standing near her. They and the others most probably didn't know they only had a short time to live.

Upon Priska Lowenbeinova's and her husband Tibor's arrival inside the camp at Auschwitz in October 1944, the train lurched to a sudden halt, throwing all the crammed in people against each other. The car door was pulled back with a loud clang. They emerged gasping for air after being packed together for days and nights. Prisoners in dirty striped uniforms pulled them violently from the wagons as they staggered down the ramps, stunned into silence by a world of high voltage fences, watchtowers manned by soldiers with machine guns, sweeping beams of searchlights; immediately assailed on all sides by aggressive cruelty as whips cracked and commands were barked at them, "Alle heraus!" (everyone out!) "Raus!" (Get out!) Schnell, Judenschwein!" (Hurry Jewish swine!) Prisoners herded all – young, old, able, barely able, across rough ground toward SS officers standing immaculately dressed, attack dogs straining at their leashes. Anyone too weak or stiff from the journey was hit by rifle butts or whipped. Priska was wrenched from Tibor's arms. She cried out for him. "We didn't know what Auschwitz was...but we knew the minute we jumped down off that train." Cries of "My children! My babies!" were lost with no time to look for loved ones.

Priska stumbled forward to come face to face with a senior SS captain. "What's the matter pretty one?" The officer asked smiling. Priska straightened her head and replied, "Nothing in this world." She didn't know she had just come face to face with Dr. Josef Mengele.

"Show me your teeth." She hesitated a moment, but did as he instructed. *Arbeiten!* (Work!) He commanded sharply. She was pushed into a column of able bodied women.

The long columns of the rest of those separated from Priska's group were marched toward to low redbrick buildings with immense chimneys spewing black, oily smoke into a leaden sky, the atmosphere thick with a putrid clay roasting smell that assaulted the nostrils and caught at the back of the throat. Those in that column were to also undress and soon to be murdered.

Severed from friends and family, women from their teens to their fifties were funneled into a narrow corridor of electrified fencing like that surrounding the vast camp. The women were driven past the chimneys and along several deep ponds to where they entered a remote building and were ordered to undressed and relinquished all possessions. Any hesitation was met with blows. From the moment they emerged gasping for air onto the ramp in the Nazis' most efficient extermination complex known as Auschwitz-Birkenau, they'd been assailed by shouts of "Schnell! Schnell!" (Hurry! Hurry!)

Their discarded clothes were rummaged through by Jewish inmates, looking for any valuables. Many cried as their hair was all shaved off, including their under arm and pubic hair, often with rough patches left on their heads. They felt their identity wrenched away.

Completely naked, Priska and the five hundred other women were then bullied outside onto a large parade ground for their first Appell, where they stood naked in cold wet clay for over an hour before facing their second "Selektion"-Selection. All Jewish, all stupefied standing naked after being transported in overcrowded rail cars from Poland and all over Nazi occupied Europe from homes or ghettos usually with family members jammed in with them, now violently separated with horrible confusion reigning as to what happened to their loved ones and what would happen to them. Most if not all from fine, extended, successful families, well educated and cultured.

Then began another inspection by Mengele, the chief physician at that time of the women's camp at Birkenau.

He went down the line, ordering others out that had any scars or injuries, or it seemed if he just didn't like their looks.

Dr. Josef Mengele halted in front of twenty eight year old Priska Lowenbeinova as she stood naked and shivering with embarrassment along with the other naked women on an open parade ground in October 1944.

"Sind sie schwanger, fescbe Frau?" (Are you pregnant pretty lady?) Dr. Mengele grabbed her breast, squeezing it.

She had to decide in a split second how to answer him. Thanking God nothing came out of her breast.

Priska shook her head, answering firmly "Nein." Knowing she was two months pregnant with her longed-for child by her husband Tibor, (who she hoped was somewhere else in the camp.). She had no idea if her answer was condemning her and her unborn child, but she felt she was in the presence of danger in the form of this impeccably dressed, suave looking, smiling officer with the gap between his front teeth.

He stared at her a second looking her up and down with forensic scrutiny as she covered her breasts with one hand and her pubic area with the other before moving on. He held in his hands a pair of pale-kid leather gauntlets which he casually flicked right or left, sending each person to to life or death. Sometimes he carried a riding crop and motioned with it for the selection of death or life.



Three women further he roughly squeezed the breast of one woman who recoiled. When a few drops of milk betrayed that she was at least sixteen weeks pregnant. "Milk, pregnant!" He announced, with a flick of his gloves, she was yanked from the line and shoved into a corner of the parade ground to join a shivering cluster of expectant mothers. Priska never heard what happened to them.



Far left, Richard Baer-Auschwitz commandant May 1944-January 1945, Dr. Joseph Mengele, Joseph Kramer commandant of Birkenau behind Rudolf Hoess(also spelled Hoss.) Auschwitz commandant May 1940-November 1943, at an SS rest camp outside Aushwitz. Gerhard Palitzsch, right. Hoess, a devoted husband, played in his garden with his five children and read them poetry while he daily sent children to the gas chambers. Palitzsch was a deputy commander who murdered hundreds of inmates by personally shooting them against a wall. Hoess was hanged 17 April 1946 by the Polish government.



**Left: Dr. Mengele, Rudolf Hoess-Auschwitz commandant, Right:Joseph Kramer commandant of Birkenau concentration camp. Photos courtesy of the United States Holocaust Museum**



Dr. Joseph Mengele  
Picture on left taken at Auschwitz  
Picture on right taken in 1938

Mengele was from a wealthy family. His father was the founder of a company producing farm machinery in Bavaria. He wished to be a great scientist. In 1935 he was awarded his PhD in physical anthropology from the University of Munich. On January 1, 1937 was appointed a research assistant at the Third Reich Institute for Heredity, Biology, and Racial Purity at the University of Frankfurt, working with Professor Otmar Freiherr von Verschuer who became a mentor and father figure. They did legitimate research protocols using twins. May 1938 he was admitted to the SS. July 1938 was awarded his medical degree by the University of Frankfurt. As part of the Waffen SS he received the Iron Cross Second Class in Ukrainian action and in January 1942 earned the Iron Cross, First Class on the eastern front. He was wounded in action on the Donets River, declared unfit for line duty and got himself appointed to Auschwitz arriving on

May 30, 1943. The very next day he was making selections at the train ramps and sent 1,035 Gypsies to their deaths. He was the chief doctor at the Gypsy camp and then the doctor of selection at the women's camp. He was always on the lookout for twins to experiment on, and other oddly formed humans such as dwarfs.

While doing selection of Jews as they came down the ramps off the train, one mother fought with a guard to stay with her thirteen year old daughter. Mengele pulled his revolver and shot them both dead, saying, "Away with this shit!" He then ordered all from that transport they came with, even those who had been selected for work, to also be put to death.

One of the more distasteful duties of the doctors at Auschwitz was standing on the platforms to meet the incoming trains. There, the doctors would divide the incoming Jews into those who would form labor gangs and those who would proceed immediately to the death chambers. Most disliked the duty and some even had to get drunk in order to do it. Not Josef Mengele. By all accounts, he enjoyed it, putting on his best uniform and even meeting trains when he wasn't scheduled to do so. Also he kept a constant look out for twins. Because of his good looks, snappy uniform, obvious enjoyment of this horrible task, and deadly experiments on inmates, he was nicknamed "the Angel of Death."

When a women's hut was found to have typhus, he ordered all 485 women to be put to death and the hut totally disinfected. This happened several times with other huts and all the inmates in those, as many as 600 or more in each hut. Another time he and other SS men had several truck loads of children taken to the body burning fire pits and threw the children in live. They used sticks to keep any from getting out until all the children burned to death. The system allowing this and other wanton murdering wherever the Nazis held control had to be stopped.

Once Mengele's assistant rounded up 14 pairs of Gypsy twins. Mengele placed them on his polished marble dissection table and put them to sleep, then injected chloroform into their hearts to kill them instantly. He then began dissecting them, noting every piece of the twin's bodies. Two other Gypsy children were sewn together, connecting their veins. They became badly infected and died in two days. Firmly endorsing the Nazi racial theory, he engaged in experiments aiming to illustrate the lack of resistance among Jews and Roma to various diseases, and attempted to demonstrate the "degeneration" of Jewish and Gypsy blood by collecting blood, tissue samples and performing amputations, sterilization, castration, electric shock and amputation, often without anesthesia. Most subjects died during or afterward. He experimented with injecting chemical solutions into eyes to change eye color, then killing the children, dissecting the bodies and sending the eyes to Berlin. Of the 3,000 twin children that went through his experiments, only around 200 survived. Sometimes he would inject chloroform into one of the twins and leave the other as a control subject to see the difference in changes as the injected twin died.

Other experiments included forcing the delay of a birth to see the effect on the mother and baby. He zealously documented in inmates the progression of Noma, prevalent in the gypsies, a type of gangrene which destroys the mucous membrane of the mouth and other tissues. His Auschwitz records, comprising two truck loads, were destroyed later by von Verschuer.

Other experiments were carried out at other camps such as the effects of sudden changes between hot and cold, various diseases, and physical endurance tests.

Renate Guttman was 6 when she and her family were sent to Auschwitz from the Theresienstadt ghetto. She was separated from her parents, taken to a hospital, strapped to



a table and cut with a knife. She got injections that made her throw up and have diarrhea. While ill in the hospital guards came through to take the sick to be killed. The nurse caring for her hid her under her long skirt and she and her brother Rene survived Auschwitz and were reunited in America in 1950. Joseph Mengele escaped right before Auschwitz was liberated in 27 January 1945. He lived for four years in Bavaria and escaped to live in South America, dying on February 7, 1979, having a massive stroke while swimming in the surf at a vacation resort near Bertioga, Brazil.



Picture of the selection process at Auschwitz. Mengele is smoking on right.  
Right: Women, chosen for work, recently shorn of their hair.



Rene and Renate Guttman outside in Prague. Their family fled Dresden, Germany to Prague, Czechoslovakia. In March 1939 the German army occupied Prague. Renate and her mother on left.



Some of the children used for experiments

Mengele would force the delay of births to see the effect on the mother and child. He had a children's camp where he would offer sweets and good food to the children who initially looked on him as sort of a kind uncle. He would then use them for experiments. After the experiments he would kill the children, dissecting them to study the effects and sending the samples to be studied further in Berlin.

Other doctors at Auschwitz conducted experiments on live subjects with sterilization by non-surgery methods such as x-rays by Dr. Horst Schumann which left severe burns and often killed the inmates, both men and women. Dr. Herta Oberheuser worked on live patients to inflict combat wounds German soldiers would encounter and would rub the wounds with slivers of glass, dirt or sawdust to see the effect, without anesthesia. Her subjects usually died within five minutes. Ruth Elias was pregnant when transferred to

Auschwitz. She delivered “A beautiful big blonde girl,” but Mengele ordered Ruth’s chest to be bound so “We can see how long a newborn baby can survive without food.” After several days a prisoner Czech doctor gave Ruth a syringe with morphine to end the child’s agony.

Dr. Carl Clauberg developed mass sterilization by introducing into the female reproductive organs a special chemical irritant that produced severe inflammation, causing the fallopian tubes to grow shut and blocked. Some of the hundreds of women died and others killed so autopsies could be performed. These sterilization experiments were for enabling the Third Reich to carry out biological destruction of conquered nations by “scientific methods”.

Dr. Horst Schumann as noted earlier experimented with sterilization by using X-rays. Several dozen Jewish men and women prisoners were brought in to have the women’s ovaries and the men’s testes exposed to various intensities of X-rays. The radiation caused severe burns on the belly, groin, and buttocks, and festering sores resistant to healing developed. Many died from complications. A report was sent to Himmler in April 1944 expressing a preference for physical castration as quicker and more certain.

Dr. Johann Paul Kremer, M.D. Ph.D. professor at the University of Munster, where he lectured on anatomy and human genetics, experimented on the changes occurring of humans during starvation, particularly in liver atrophy. Called the “Musselman” state, right at the final stages of starvation. He ordered most of them killed by phenol injection after asking them their medical history and then doing autopsies and making slides of the liver, spleen, and pancreas.

With up to eight hundred women in each block, disease rampaged through the huts with dysentery and diarrhea a daily scourge. There was no soap or toothbrush. The veterans showed them how to use sand to scrub themselves, and some of their own urine to clean the sores that began occurring from the many lice bites without any medical help or sanitation. Tormented by hunger and thirst, missing love ones and the life they had known, itching from sores, barely able to stand their own smell, much less the pervasive, penetrating stink all through the huts, death seemed inevitable and many often woke up next to a corpse. A fact they often hid to claim an extra share of food.

Priska’s dear husband had told her to think of only beautiful things but this colorless land of yellow clay, with a horizon of barbed wire, the stagnant air reeking of death in a camp reduced once vibrant people to an inhuman existence of shadow people, shapeless specters of gaunt people with catatonic expressions. At night sometimes Priska’s guardian friend Edita would whisper, “Open mouth.” And she would put a sliver of potato peel or bread into Priska’s mouth.

Rachel Friedman and her three sisters, like Priska, were standing naked to go through another selection by Dr. Mengele and chosen for a slave labor camp. Anyone asking for a drink or to go to the latrine were slapped by the capos. They were hustled into a building and thrown random clothing from those gassed. Then lined up outside in the bitter cold wind and given a bit of liquid in bowls they realized had previously been used as chamber pots. They sat for hours in the mud, seeing the strange crimson glow in the sky, trying not to breath what smelled like burning meat, leaving a caustic taste in their mouths. Veteran inmates would cruelly tease, “See those chimneys? They gas people here and then they burn them. If your mother went to the left, that’s where she is now.”

Anka Nathan, pregnant, went through the same selection after being crammed together in a third class car for two days with no place to move and little air, forbidden to lift blinds or

open windows. With no food or water, "The worst experience of all was the thirst." Before arriving some did open the windows. They spotted the chimneys spouting fire. "We did not know then what it meant...the impression was gruesome...I will never forget that smell..."

Upon arriving they were thrust out of the cars into bedlam. "...It was like the apocalypse...with that smell and those flames...No one could imagine how terrible that place was. It was indescribable." Told to go right, they were hustled off to a building where they were told to undress, and told anyone resisting would be shot. All jewelry was torn from them and they were shorn of all hair. After being thrown random clothing and shoes they were run toward their hut. One woman asked, "Why are they roasting meat here?" Twelve women to a bunk in the hut was the accommodation, with the smell of unwashed bodies and worse was pervasive. "Everything became a ghastly nightmare." From comments made by the Kapos, Anka knew her parents, sisters, and brother Peter had ended in the gas chamber. This living hell took place daily in all the death camps in Poland and Germany.

The first dawn they were chased out of their block by guards wielding sticks, ordered to strip, and made to stand for hours in cold mud as they were checked and rechecked, shivering, trying not to breathe the ash in the air floating down. She learned to think of getting through hour by hour. Day by day, four o'clock in the morning, going through more selections, lasting hours, any not fitting the ideal worker were taken away. If someone fainted or became ill, they were also taken directly to the gas chambers. On the morning of 10 October, 1944, Anka heard Dr. Mengele tell his subordinates in German, "This time, very good material."

The freezing / hypothermia experiments were conducted for the Nazi high command. The experiments were conducted on men to simulate the conditions the armies suffered on the Eastern Front. The German forces were ill prepared for the bitter cold. There thousands of German soldiers died of freezing or were debilitated by cold injuries. The experiments were conducted under the supervision of Dr. Sigmund Rascher at Birkenau, Dachau and Auschwitz . Dr. Rascher reported directly to Himmler. Dr. Rascher publicized the results of his freezing experiments at the 1942 medical conference entitled "Medical Problems Arising from Winter and Sea".

The freezing experiments were divided into two parts. First, to establish how long it would take to lower the body temperature to death and second how to best resuscitate the frozen victim.

The two main methods used to freeze the victim were to put the person in a icy vat of water or to put the victim outside naked in sub-zero temperatures.

The icy vat method proved to be the fastest way to drop the body temperature. The selections were made of young healthy Jews or Russians. They were usually stripped naked and prepared for the experiment. The victim was then placed in the vat of cold water and started to freeze. It was learned that most victims lost consciousness and died when the body temperature dropped to 25 C.

The second way to freeze a victim was to strap them to a stretcher and place them outside naked. The extreme winters of Auschwitz made a natural place for this experiment.

The resuscitation or warming experiments were just as cruel and painful as the freezing experiments. One was by a heat lamp which usually burned the victims, the other, a hot bath, was found to have the best results. If done too fast the pain was tremendous.

Priska and her group were marched to a long hut and locked inside with far too many other people. Edita, a friend, took it upon herself in never leaving her side and helped keep the pregnant Priska alive. Those already there would ask if the newcomers had anything to eat. Where was everyone else? What about their families, the newcomers asked the veteran inmates. The skinny wretches of almost every nationality, with sunken eyes, pointed to the fiery smoke belching from the chimneys, "See that?" They would murmur with a twisted smile, "That's where your loved ones are – and that's where we'll all end up!"

Once Priska heard about the gas chambers and started breathing in the nauseating stink of roasting human flesh and scorched hair, the Nazis' promises about annihilating the Jews on a grand scale, impossible to believe at first, now seemed an unspeakable truth. The smoke hung around them like a death shroud.

The subterranean undressing rooms sloping down to the gas chambers were fitted with electric lifts to take the corpses up to the massive ovens. At their peak they could gas 8,000 men, women, and children in a day. The winds sent the grey ash and powdered bones of loved ones in spiraling whorls across the whole area, leaving thick dust on every surface and on the lips. The ashes were first scattered in deep ponds at the camp's edge. When those filled up the human ashes were dumped into a glade of birch trees and then used as fertilizer on nearby fields, making them the largest Jewish graveyard in the world.

For Priska and her fellow inmates, hunger and horrible thirst was an hour by hour torture. Trains arriving packed with people from all over, after the quick selection at the ramps, would have most sent to be gassed. There the SS would promise drink and food if they would just quickly undress and have their showers for health's sake. Leaving the condemned in a state of desperate thirst kept them in line with promises of relief until their clothing was left in huge heaps to be gone through for any worth and valuables after they were herded into the death chambers. 90% of the people arriving at Auschwitz were murdered. 9 out of every 10 killed at Birkenau were Jewish. 50,000 Polish prisoners died there and 20,000 Gypsies. In May 1944 a train spur was built into the camp to aid with the processing of the 440,000 Hungarian Jews to be exterminated.



Latrine at Auschwitz where they only had a few minutes once or twice a day to relieve themselves. They were given nothing to wipe themselves with.



Women and children who have been selected for death walking to the gas chambers, thinking they were on their way to take showers and then get food and drink.



Inside a men's hut at Birkenau painted by a survivor.



The inside of a women's hut shortly after liberation. They were given blankets.



May 26, 1944 just arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau before selection. Most if not all were gassed within hours. One can only imagine their thoughts.

Anka, Rachel, Priska, and the girls selected for labor with them were sent to a munitions factory in Freiberg in Saxony, southwest of Dresden. The train from Auschwitz took two nights and three days with little food or water. "We were demented with thirst. It is indescribably awful...you would give anything for a gulp of water." There were Czech, German, Slovak, Dutch, Polish, Hungarian, Russian, and even Americans in the arriving group. There were other slave camps nearby at Oederan and Hainichen. Trains transporting inmates to and from ghettos, concentration and labor camps passed through Freiberg during the war.

The Japanese had something similar in medical experimenting called Project 731 in Manchuria. They experimented mainly on Chinese citizens and soldiers. Toward the end of the war they experimented on eight American POWs, injecting them with various diseases. The longest any of the Americans survived was three months.



From Japan comes word of a university medical museum with a new exhibit detailing vivisections conducted at the school on another eight American airmen captured in the final days of World War II. The so-called experiments performed on the living prisoners at the Kyushu University medical school included the removal of a whole lung, a stomach, and a liver, as well as pieces of brain.

The first of the unlucky eight was Staff Sergeant Teddy Ponczka of Pennsylvania, who had been stabbed with a bamboo spear during his capture. He must have assumed he would be receiving treatment for his wound when he was brought into an operating theater. Another prisoner was operated on later that day, followed by the six others during three more sessions. None of them had been injured, but apparently still did not imagine what awaited them.

"It's because the prisoners thought that we were doctors, since they could see the white smocks, that they didn't struggle," Dr. Toshio Tono—then a medical student—would tell a reporter decades later. "They never dreamed they would be dissected."



Staff Sergeant Teddy Ponczka pictured:  
After taking out one prisoner's liver, a surgeon was heard to say, "This is a removal of the liver and we are going to see how long the man would live without his liver."

All of the prisoners died, no more than three months before V-J Day. The perpetrators hurriedly sought to conceal their crime after Japan's surrender. They cremated the remains and faked records that said the prisoners had been transferred to Hiroshima and killed by the atomic bomb.

American authorities soon discovered the truth, and 30 suspects were arrested. But the prisoners' families were initially told only that their loved ones were missing in action. Then somebody sent the mother of one prisoner, 22-year-old Lt. Dale Plambeck of Fremont, Nebraska, a clipping from a Denver newspaper making a reference to the medical experiments. Gertrude Plambeck wrote the War Department letter after letter after letter. "If it wasn't every day, it was almost every day," her granddaughter, Ginger Bruner, remembers. "She didn't give up." No reply had come in June 1947, when the missing airman's father, Albert Plambeck, died on what would have been his son's 25th birthday.

That November, the families were finally notified that the prisoners "may have died" as a result of medical experiments. A formal confirmation only came in January 1950, two years after the perpetrators were tried and five of them were handed death sentences that Gen. Douglas MacArthur then commuted.

The letter to Plambeck's mother read in part: "Investigation has conclusively established that he was one of the victims of a series of experimental operations that were performed at Kyushu Imperial University on 17, 20 and 25 May, and 2 June 1945." "It was found impossible to ascertain the identity of the prisoners who were executed on any given date," the letter continued. "It is necessary, therefore, to accept 2 June 1945, the latest date on which your son could have been alive, as the date of his death." One date Gertrude Plambeck knew for certain was March 25, 1945, the day her son's daughter, Ginger, was born. That had been two weeks after Dale Plambeck headed off to one month and 11 days before his B-29 bomber was brought down by a Japanese fighter over the island of Kyushu.

## Chapter Fifty Eight

October 21 the first flying bomb they had seen, the V-1, went over Pop's unit area in Belgium. The V stood for vengeance weapon in Hitler's arsenal, and in the next 24 hours 30 more V-1s pass over the Division area. Road maintenance continues and the engineers are tasked with digging new defensive positions for 23<sup>rd</sup> Inf. Reg. The Engineer Bn. is operating two saw mills and building a timber trestle bridge over the railroad at St. Vith. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Inf. Div. is in the First Army along with the rest of Eight Corps.

October 28 Lt. Col. Snetzer and Capt. Van Fossan went into St. Vith with trucks to get tar paper, and had a great meal and beer for 55 cents. They spent the night and visited a night club with bar and orchestra but went fully armed. The 12th Army Group Hq. was in town and the city was shelled by the Germans during the night.

From Col. Snetzer's diary. "November 8 first snow. It continued for most of the night. Buzz bombs getting closer with one hitting 400 yards away from Bn. headquarters. Port of Antwerp, Belgium received first supply ship with the clearing of the Scheldt Estuary." The port was captured but it took over two weeks to clear out the enemy troops on both sides of the estuary that would fire on anything that moved toward Antwerp.

"The Black Market in Antwerp is rampant. A person can get anything if you have the money. The City has some air raid alerts with Buzz bombs landing inside but little other war damage. British Army has huge engineer dumps with Bailey and pontoon bridge equipment and long British convoys move toward the city from France."

All bridges across the Meuse River at Liege have been knocked out by U.S. bombers, and the Army with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. has captured lots of big German airfields now in full Allied use and heavily camouflaged.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Inf. Div. is now in the Schnee Eiffel region. By November 11 it's been snowing for three days, and the snow sticks to the trees and fields but melts off the roads, making them deep with mud.

On the Siegfried Line a foot of snow covers everything. In the valleys near the Line it melts but up on the Schnee Eiffel it now remains on everything. On November 16th the rest of the First and the Ninth Army launch an attack north of 2<sup>nd</sup> Inf. Sector. Patton's Third Army has been progressing slowly in an attack in the Metz area for a week. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Inf. Div. and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Eng. Bn. is sitting in the same position it came into October 5.

Soon it is Thanksgiving Day and raining continuously. The snow is now washed away with mud everywhere and rivers flooding. It is dark, dreary days. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. sector the activity is mostly patrols and artillery shooting from both sides. The patrols are slogs through



wet, dark woods, staying on constant alert, watching out for an enemy looking for you. Artillery explosions all over the sector keep everyone on edge.

The Ninth and First Armies are making slow, deadly progress. Third, First French, and Seventh Armies have advanced considerably. The Army mess and logistics unit did its job and Pop and the Div. headquarters staff had a full turkey dinner with all the trimmings.

North into the VII Corps sector, east of Aachen the battle rages there continuously with 200-300 yard advances daily. The country is completely torn up with knocked out tanks everywhere and rain and mud. The 324 Engineers of the 99<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. left the states in September to arrive not long ago in Belgium. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Inf. Div. is still where it was two months ago.

## Chapter Fifty Nine

The Second Infantry was in assault formation, attacking the Schnee Eiffel, a vast ridgeline, heavily wooded, almost impenetrable forest, much like the Hurtgen Forest where other American divisions had waged a weeks long deadly slugfest with the Germans. The Schnee Eiffel was skirted by sloping hay fields where fierce fighting had just taken place. The 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was off to its left also in the attack.

To most men of the Second, the Wehlerscheid Offensive became known as the battle of Heartbreak Crossroad; a savage, costly four-day battle in freezing weather, with certain, costly victory being snatched away beyond control of the men who fought there.

The Crossroad was a battle for the Roer River Dams, to capture them if possible or force the enemy to blow them and eliminate the threat of floodwaters wrecking river crossings planned along the river. The river ran several hundred miles from Gemund north, and was a dangerous threat to the Allied advance as long as the Germans controlled the dams. The division's mission was extremely important.

Roads into Germany had proven to be scarce and heavily defended. There was only one good one leading to the dams in the Second's zone.

Both divisions were attacking toward the Siegfried Line and the Roer River Dams, their current objectives. The constant rain, wet snow, and increasing cold contributed to miserable conditions for the men who slept in damp bunkers or trenches dug into the ground. The 99<sup>th</sup> Division during this time had more than a thousand men hospitalized due to trench foot, pneumonia, and frost-bite, further depleting its combat ready strength.

In late November and early December 1944, though General Bradley and General Eisenhower were concerned about the weakness in the Ardennes sector, they believed the Germans too beaten down and lacking in manpower and supplies to mount an effective attack as German General Erwin Rommel had done when he stormed through the same area in 1940. But then Rommel faced little resistance and had good weather and roads. The American 99<sup>th</sup> Division, the 106<sup>th</sup> fresh from training, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry and the 4<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, both latter ones badly mauled in the Hurtgen forest slugfest, would hold just fine until fresh divisions could be assembled for the broad based spring offensive. Some were even predicting the war would be over by Christmas or soon thereafter, Eisenhower had even expressed something close to that effect to an associate.

German Field Marshals Model and von Rundstedt were meeting with Hitler on the morning of October 22, 1944. He had sent them earlier his plan for a smashing blow to the western front, convinced that Allied public opinion no longer wanted this war and would clamor for an armistice with this German "corpse" that was suddenly so lively and still killing Allied soldiers. Then he could throw all the divisions into battle on the Eastern Front, saving Europe from the Asiatic hordes.

Operation "Grief", named after a mystical German bird, was the operation of deception manned by English speaking German soldiers dressed as Americans that would disrupt

directions and do demolition behind Allied lines in the coming German attack named, *Wacht am Rhein* – Watch on the Rhine.

Model and von Rundstedt were extremely skeptical of Hitler's grand, bold, plan: Rundstedt's viewed the plan as far too ambitious and Model decided it "didn't have a leg to stand on." When they voiced objections he interrupted them, citing how Frederick the Great had taken bold action, dividing his enemies and going on to win the Franco-Prussian War. The two generals knew it was useless to argue further. They had six weeks to prepare for the massive offensive.

Throughout November they amassed two hundred thousand men and many tons of supplies. Twenty five new divisions were created from Navy, Luftwaffe personnel, middle aged men from industrial plants, and tens of thousands of Hitler youth, some as young as fifteen.

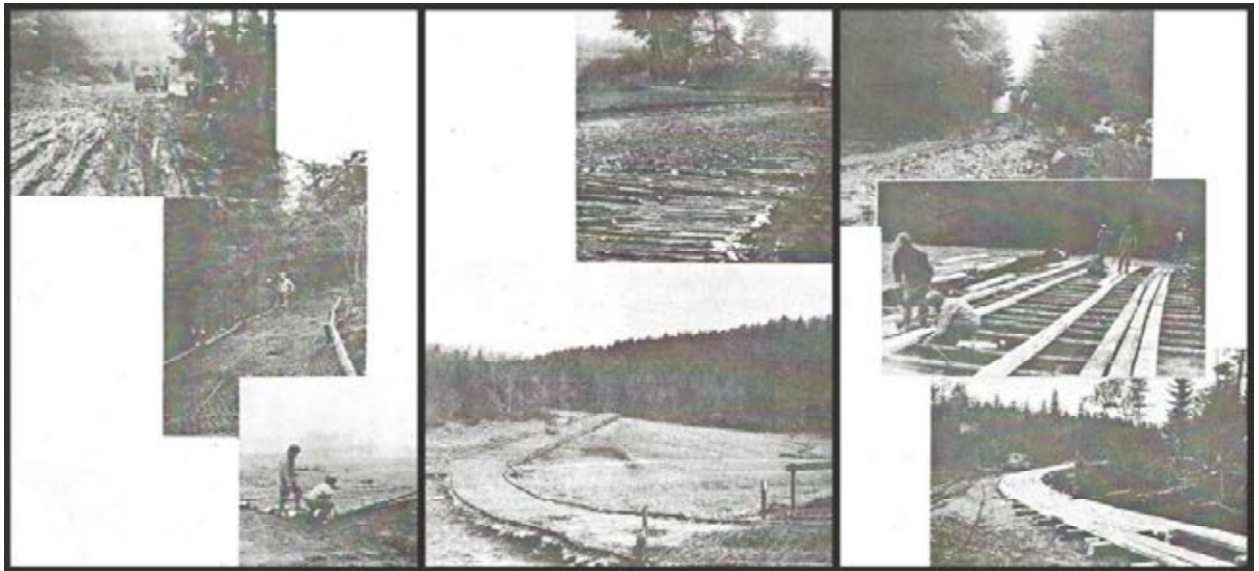
The make or break attack was entrusted to an old Nazi friend, SS General Sepp Dietrich, a hard drinking former WWI sergeant and loyal follower from the 1920s. All SS units in the Western theater would be re-equipped and reinforced. In total secrecy hundreds of Panzer and Tiger tanks and thousands of self propelled artillery pieces would be placed behind the front lines and camouflaged so Allied planes wouldn't notice.

There were small villages connected by largely unpaved roads that couldn't bear the heavy vehicles of armies. The sloping terrain was a mixture of hay fields populated by dairy cattle that gave way to higher hills crowned by thickly wooded forests of mature pine trees that formed an impenetrable canopy above along a ridge formation broken by gullies and deep ravines that stretched for miles.

The front was referred to in the Allied command as "The Ghost Front", in that there was a kind of unspoken agreement in the Allied commanders minds that both sides were taking a break, though the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions were moving up into the Schnee Eifel in the attack. To the men on the line though, there was no question on both sides that everyone on the other side was out to kill them.

The land was largely rolling hills with the land sloping upward as the Americans moved forward. They encountered small German unit action, some reinforced patrols and sudden firefights. A lot of the action of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion was in keeping the roads passable. In particularly marshy areas the battalion's soldiers would cut down smaller pines to form a corduroy road. This kept the vehicles from sinking into the earth. The battalion had graders and bulldozers working constantly on roads.

In St. Vith the Engineer battalion took over and ran a civilian sawmill which cut more than 200,000 board feet of lumber in the Belgian forest for infantry shelter construction, plank roads and even a highway overpass on the main supply route. As the net of unimproved roads in the Division sector became a morass in the heavy rains, the battalion took over and ran seven different rock quarries to provide materials for roads. The Battalion build roads of mine tailings, planks, and brush on thickly timbered slopes of conifers to maintain the supplies on the thinly stretched front.



Note the boggy road in the top left picture. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion soldiers used various methods to keep roads passable for all 2<sup>nd</sup> Division vehicle movements, even building various surfaces from the surrounding forests that were cut and sawed to build them.

All of this was done with intermittent hostile mortar and artillery warfare with German troops throughout the period. The infantry and recon units performed day and night patrols to ascertain the German strengths and positions. Between October 4 and December 11 the Second Infantry waged incessant patrol and artillery warfare with enemy troops in the deep pine forests and ridges of the Schnee-Eifel. Combat groups jabbed enemy lines and battled enemy patrols. German patrols made raids through gaps in the American lines.

Intel estimated at the time the various German units right in front of the Division compromised some 8,200 enemy soldiers and 30 tanks.

The boards from the saw mill were also used in constructing bunkers for the Division's infantry and commander centers. With the assistance of another engineer battalion the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineers for the 23 Infantry Regiment built a complete regimental defensive position, including communication trenches, gun positions, a kitchen, cut and cover squad shelters, and latrines. These were made from cutting the trees from the surrounding forests and piling them into layers above bunkers an infantry squad would occupy.

Because of the lengthy front line, strong points for defensive purposes in the form of Tobruk type bunkers were quickly built by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion. These were protected by barbed wire and mines. They could hold a platoon and be defended from any direction. Five days after the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division took over the area, Von Rundstedt's offensive hit the thinly held line with terrific force, but it was several days before he was able to break through the strong defenses the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineers had constructed.

When the 23<sup>rd</sup> Regiment withdrew from their position on the West Wall of the Siegfried Line, Pop directed Company B of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineers in destroying 50 thick concrete pillboxes. He supervised the charge set ups and emplacement for maximum explosive effect. This was done by wiring together blocks of TNT, enough to render the pillboxes unusable, priming the blocks with a blasting cap which was set off electrically by a det box. This was done to deny the huge bunkers to the enemy if they were ever reoccupied by the Germans.



Left: Concrete bunker from the "West Wall" blown by B Company engineers under Pop's direction, denying any further use to the Germans.



Army combat engineer placing TNT cans under an abandoned German tank in Tunisia.

Fall rains and snow was just starting turned the rural roads into soft, impassable mud, which the engineers were tasked to keep passable. The engineer soldiers were also called to clear mine fields and provide water to all the division's troops.

Pop was constantly on the move with Sgt. Barryhill driving him to all the many positions all around the Division's twenty eight mile front it was responsible for. There were still some limited German patrols and occasional artillery and mortar. V-1 rockets "Buzz bombs" flying overhead were becoming a daily occurrence. Whenever one fell short on its way to blast London it made a terrific explosion.

During the period of 10-12 December 1944 the 106<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. relieved the 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Schnee Eifel area while the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division moved northward to the Elsenborn, Belgium area for the attack northeast to the Roer River.

Some in the 2<sup>nd</sup> muttered about the 106<sup>th</sup> inheriting such a quite sector. Units of the 106<sup>th</sup> assumed responsibility for the border areas the 2<sup>nd</sup> Inf. had held since October 4. Five days later this was to end with the violence of Von Rundstedt's cyclone striking the 106<sup>th</sup> with full force, inflicting grievous casualties.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry moved about twenty miles north to an assembly area near Elsenborn, Belgium to rejoin the V Corps for the rest of the war. It has snowed heavily for the last three days with the snow drifting in higher areas where the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineers were going north of Malmedy.

From here the 2<sup>nd</sup> Inf. Div. went right into launching a winter offensive through the snow covered Monschau Forest against another sector of the Siegfried Line near Rocherath, Belgium.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division passed through the 99<sup>th</sup> Division to make this attack to secure the Roer River Dams, especially Dam number Five in the Urft chain of lakes. That the Germans might blow the dams and flood the country from the swollen Roer in the event of a crossing was sufficient to prevent an armored breakthrough toward the Rhine.

The best German shock troops held the area, heavily forested with narrow, deep cut valleys and knife ridges. A handful of villages dotted the forest with little open ground. The Siegfried Line ran through Hofen, Wehlerscheid, Udenbreth, and Scheid in the sector, with more fortifications in dept at Wehlerscheid and along the Wehlerscheid-Dreiborn Ridge.

The Division CP was set up in the little town of Wirtzfeld as the 9<sup>th</sup> Inf. Regiment prepared for the attack from the nearby town of Krinkelt. Pop and a group of headquarters staff were in Elsenborn.

There was only one good road leading to the objective of this attack, the seizing of the vital Roer River Dams, on its tributary the Urft River. Possession of these dams by the enemy prohibited any attempt by VII Corps and the Ninth U.S. ARMY to cross the Roer River further downstream and advance on Cologne. Destruction of the dams at a critical moment would flood the town of Duren to a depth of 6 meters and cause the entire valley to be temporarily impassable, thereby annihilating or isolating the troops advancing across, or East of, the Roer.

The road ran from Rocherath, Belgium, across the German border at Wehlerscheid – soon called Heartbreak Crossroad – and thence beyond the Siegfried Line where it branched into an excellent road net.

Along the German border the Rocherath road passed through the Manschau Forest and at Wehlerscheid, in the forest's heart, Siegfried Line fortifications were clamped across it like a vice. Barring the way into Germany were 25 concrete pillboxes in the forest on both sides of the road. For 200 yards on their approach trees had been cleared to give the German gunners clear fire, along with mines, and stretched masses of barbed wire all across the clearing.

The 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment spearheaded the attack of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division on December 13 driving into the Monschau Forest astride the Rocherath-Wehlerscheid road. Knee deep snow, in places, hampered and quickly exhausted the doughboys burdened with weapons, ammunition, and packs. The forest was so thick, with trees so close their branches were interwoven, the men had to push their way through. A slight thaw sent the snow on the trees dripping down on the men, soaking them. When the weather turned intensely cold that night, they slept in the forest and their wet clothing froze.

From Lt. Col. Snetzer's diary: "I could cry for sorrow for them as they wearily plodded forward thru the deep snow with enormous rolls on their back, their faces brown with cold and several days growth of beard, their overcoats steamy with melting snow. Tonight they lie in snow in desolate wild forests awaiting tomorrow's battle. The poor devils are being asked to do too much. It isn't fair. They get along without the very necessities of life and die so miserably."



Waiting in the snow to kick off the attack and advancing through the Manschau Forest along the Rocherath-Wehlerscheid Road to village of Wehlerscheid inside Germany. On the right: The German border at Wehlerscheid, named HeartBreak Crossroad by the GIs.



The next morning they jumped off into battle without artillery support. The commanders hoping they could surprise the Germans by working through the woods without artillery announcement. The infantry made their way to the edge of the clearing in front of the line of heavily fortified enemy pillboxes and attacked with many casualties.

The Engineers were right behind finding and clearing Teller, Riegel, and S-Mines, in abates. The infantry made it up to the clearing undetected, but once they crossed the anti-tank ditch, hundreds of German guns of many calibers exhaled a murderous fire on them.

There was German artillery, mortar fire, and AP (anti-personnel) mines throughout the woods. The infantry suffers from the cold and snow and lives in the wild with no shelters, and soaking wet. Combat exhaustion cases are creeping up.

The Engineer Battalion CP was moved to Wirtzfeld where the Division CP is also located. The Engineer companies are bivouacked in the town with C company in the woods.

At Heartbreak Crossroads squads and parts of platoons, lead with extreme bravery, wriggled into the open area, cutting paths through barbed wire, calling in artillery, taking fire from interlocking German machine guns and mortars, and taking many casualties. Some of the infantry assault companies were already at 50% casualties.

For the next 48 hours Second Division artillery pounded the pillboxes while patrols from the three battalions of the 9<sup>th</sup> fought deadly skirmishes to dislodge the Germans. After dark on December 15 an eleven man patrol made its way through a breach in the barbed wire and made their way into the enemy lines, surrounding a German pillbox. They alerted their commanders by telephone and other troops rushed through in the gap. The Third Battalion, commanded by Lt. Col. William Kernan, San Antonio, Texas rushed through and in a blaze of firing took the pillbox and spread out. There wasn't enough explosive to destroy the pillboxes as they fell into American hands. The preference would be to blow them up in case they ever fell back into German hands. Some of the pill box defenders tried to escape and were killed, many surrendered.

With the German line breached, Gen. Robertson ordered the 38<sup>th</sup> Regiment to pass through the 9<sup>th</sup> to attack towards its objective, Deriborn, Germany. The 38<sup>th</sup> pushed 1,500 yards against sometimes very stubborn resistance.



Pop getting his medal of valor from General Robertson for the action in putting a bridge across the Vier River in Normandy in France under fire. (Being under fire had turned into a common occurrence.) This was awarded while they were in the Schnee Eifel.



## Chapter Sixty

One special platoon of the 99<sup>th</sup> Division, designated the I&R Platoon, Intelligence and Reconnaissance, was lodged in Lanzerath. It had a four man attachment of artillery observers. The men were specially picked and headed by a Lieutenant Lyle Bouck, a few days away from his twenty first birthday. Most of the men had just come over from England in November, having never seen combat.

Little activity had been seen on the German front, but Lt. Springer, of the artillery section, spotted a Belgium man acting suspiciously and sent him back to their battalion for questioning. The same day Private Vic Adams of Bock's unit checked his feet and found they were turning black, Lyle Bouck sent him back to Hunningen to get them doctored.

The platoon was located on a hill just out of Lazerath in reinforced bunkers at the top of a hill fronted by a long open field from the town. The temperature continued plunging below freezing, and snow the last few days had heavily blanketed the area and their bunkers. That night they heard what sounded like two men walking along and breaking through the frozen crust on top of the snow. Sgt. Slape, the platoon sergeant, gave the order to open fire. It turned out to be a German scout dog. They also continued hearing clanking sounds coming through the woods from the other side and shot a couple more dogs they encountered a German patrol using. All this information they sent up to division but never heard anything more about it.

The one American commander who anticipated the German's plan and attack was General George Patton, but no one in the American high command heeded his counsel. He had mostly stopped trying to give it after being designated head of a fictitious Army group in the tremendously effective Operation Fortitude that kept the Germans thinking the Channel invasion was taking place at the Pas de Calais, thus keeping the large, heavily armed German 15<sup>th</sup> Army from immediately attacking the Allies at Normandy until Operation Overlord was on its way to success. When he heard of the July 20<sup>th</sup> attack on Hitler's life, he was chomping at the bit to enter the fray with a combat command. As noted earlier, that he got when he took over the Third Army during the breakout of Operation Cobra.

Down in Lanzerath, members of the artillery observation reported to their battery that all kinds of lights and noises were going on in Losheim, "but nobody paid any attention to us."

At the 99th's 394<sup>th</sup>'s regimental headquarters in Hunningen, Major Kirz, the regimental commander, was convinced the Germans were massing for a large attack. "You could hear the armored vehicles moving...something was going to happen...I know that higher headquarters also knew it. I bypassed division several times to see if anyone would listen to me." No one did. By dawn it would be too late.

## Chapter Sixty One - The Battle

Eighty men of the 1<sup>st</sup> company, 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment, 3<sup>rd</sup> Paratrooper Division, shivered under the silent woods and sky, stamping their feet to ward off frost bite as their commander read the order from General Von Runstedt, exhorting all German troops to their holy obligation to give their all for their Fatherland and Fuhrer.

At 5:30 a.m. they put their hands to their ears as shattering explosions made flashes of light along an eighty mile front caused the sky to be as bright as day. The shelling was heaviest in their sector, earmarked for the American front just in front of the Sixth Panzer Army under Sepp Dietrich. The earth shook under the impact of the blows.

There was trouble to the south of the Second Division's position. The morning of Dec 16 began with a vicious shelling of the Bn. CP in Wirtzfeld at 0530 and everyone scrambled into the basements of the houses. A V-1 Buzz Bomb hit in the Division Ordnance Company, causing heavy casualties and completely wrecking the motor section. Up on the line at Heart Break Crossroads the fighting continues slowly against tough terrain, snow, and the pill boxes. Engineer companies A and C were working hard opening up a good, passable road right up to the Infantry front positions. There was heavy shelling all up and down the entire Army front. Some of the men said it was the heaviest artillery fire they had come under since Hill 192 in Normandy.

Threatening shadows in the afternoon of December 16 assumed a darker appearance when Gen. Robertson received orders not to commit the 23<sup>rd</sup> Regiment to the attack the 9<sup>th</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup> Regiments were already fully engaged in at Heart Break Crossroad. The 23<sup>rd</sup> was just getting ready to move out from Camp Elsenborn to join the 9<sup>th</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup> in the penetration at Heartbreak Crossroads. The two regiments were still fighting ahead against rough snowy terrain and pill boxes with the U.S. Infantry infiltrating at night between and on top of the pill boxes. The A and C Engineer companies had been working hard opening up MSR right up to the infantry front positions. The enemy shelling that next morning was extremely heavy all along the front.

Later in the day Maj. Gen. Huebner, deputy commander of V Corps, and Gen. Robertson held a hasty conference about a change in plans. A serious threat to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was now a definite conclusion.

The next morning the truth became known. On December 17<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 a.m. Gen. Robertson learned from the V Corps cmdr. that the enemy was attacking along the entire

front of other divisions and had broken through the defenses of a neighboring division on the right and rear, seriously threatening the 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. flank and CP at Wirtzfeld.

With two regiments miles ahead pressing an ongoing attack, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was in a precarious position. To prevent them from being completely cut off, the remainder of the Division, rear echelon, and special units had to hold the surging tide when it struck until the 9<sup>th</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup> could pull back and establish a defense in Rocherath and Krinkelt. Cooks, clerks, truck drivers, everyone who could fire a rifle or man a weapon was thrown into the various defense lines hastily formed against the fury of the German attack; holding the line enough to keep a major part of the Division from being cut off. Everyone had to hold the line until the two regiments could pull out of the attack, pull back miles, and establish a stronger defense line in Rocherach, Krinkelt, and Wirtzfeld.

A serious German counter-attack was developing around Rocherath. The 9<sup>th</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup> Regiments had to start pulling back quickly to avoid encirclement and to help stem the growing German attack. The pillboxes so dearly won in the Wehlerscheid area were given up without a fight.

Dogfights waged overhead, in the distance rumbled artillery explosions and the forest was filled with anti-aircraft fire. In the midst of this the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry broke contact with the enemy and gave up Heartbreak Crossroad. Many days and lives would pass before they returned.

Just before the enemy kicked off the battle, fifty miles to the north of Hunningen, on the outskirts of the Hurtgen Forest, sat the German Lieutenant Colonel Jochen Peiper, with orders to proceed to the small town of Dueren to help the inhabitants clean up after it had been bombed by the U.S. Eight Air Force. He was shocked by the extent of the damage to the town and its people. But Piper was familiar with death, having been the creator of plenty of it. He toured a defeated Poland in 1940 alongside SS chief Himmler. He was arrogant, impetuous, and intelligent. His ruthless and daring exploits in the Soviet Union had endeared him to Hitler and under SS Panzer Division's Sepp Dietrich, he had saved an entire infantry division through a brilliant tank maneuver. He had never joined the Nazi party, wanting to be promoted only on his actions, but was a fanatical supporter of Adolf Hitler with a personally signed copy of *Mein kampf* by Hitler being his most prized possession.

Neither Soviet or German units in the German retreat generally took prisoners. The Germans also practiced scorched earth policies during their retreat on the Soviet front, burning down whole villages. Near Kharkov, Peiper commanded a unit to "bump off all inhabitants, including women and children. ..Peiper actively participated in the action." ,said one of his men. Peiper then served in Italy against partisans where he also killed civilians in trying to wipe out resistance.

The 1<sup>st</sup> SS Panzer Division would spearhead Sepp Dietrich's Six Panzer Army. Long lines of German trucks filled the Schnee Eiffel's narrow mountain roads. The American soldiers on the front kept hearing vehicle movement. The 1st division commander, SS Colonel Wilhelm Mohnke told Peiper that his kampfguppe would take Route D that ran from the border village of Losheim through the Losheim Gap to Honsfeld and then through some small villages to a town called Trois Ponts and then on Belgian Route Nationale N-23 and then to the Meuse River. Peiper commented the route was for bicycles, not tanks, but there was to be no objections. He had twenty four hours to reach the Meuse. There would be no looting and stopping to fire into small groups of American defenders who might make a

stand. They couldn't afford to waste a single minute if they were to save the Third Reich. Their route would take them almost right through Pop and his division.

250,000 German soldiers, plus tanks, artillery, and aircraft were poised right in front of the Allied lines, ready to launch a devastating surprise storm of steel.

There was two feet of snow on the ground. Suddenly explosions started in the distance and began creeping nearer. Pop was asleep in a house in the Elsenborn area with Captain Van Fossen, the Engineer Battalion S-4 supply officer. Van Fossen told Pop, "Bob, something's going on, we've got to get out of here." Pop told him to go back to sleep and rolled over, he'd been through this before. But the shells started landing closer. So they got up, as they were prepared, having slept full dressed, scrambled down to the basement, and waited out the barrage as there wasn't any value to go outside and get blown away right then. Throughout the barrage the house they were in received some close blows but not a direct one.

Capt. Fred Valentino, a 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer company commander, was in his jeep moving forward up a long open lane bordered by trees early that morning, when suddenly, "Whom!" he said, explosions started all around he and his driver. They slammed on the brakes and dove into a nearby ditch to wait for a break in the bombardment.

The four man artillery detachment in Lazeranth, headed by Lt. Springer, heeded the advice of one of the tank destroyer group that was pulling out and went to the I&R bunkers.

A German patrol had wounded and captured some members of the platoon. The three captured men joined a growing line of American POWs as they trudged under guard toward Germany.

The Germans started coming into Lazeranth in strength. From their uniforms the Americans could tell they were paratroopers, crack units of the German Army. Things got too hot in the town and the rest of the platoon, eighteen men in all, ran back to the platoon's bunkers about three hundred yards south and above the town at the edge of a woods. In front of them was a wide open field coming up at about a twenty five degree angle from Lazeranth and was at least five hundred yards across.

Germans, as many as five hundred, were advancing on Lanzerath. Bouck called regiment asking for artillery support ASAP. The voice on the other end told him he must be seeing things. Bouck blew up at the voice on the other end but though he waited, the artillery never came. He and his men were outside the boundary of the 99<sup>th</sup> Div., outside their regimental boundary, and outside the V Corps boundary. Artillery was desperately needed all along the Ghost Front and was being directed to assigned areas in boundaries.

He called regimental headquarters again and asked if they should go or stay. He received the order that no commander wants to ever receive, "Stay! You are to hold at all costs."

About two hundred and fifty Germans moved along the road across their front until a young, teenage girl came out a house and pointed out Bouck's position to a German officer with the group. The Germans dove for the ditches as Bouck's men opened fire, hitting a few of the Germans with surprise now lost.

Lieutenant Bouck knew the Germans would now flank them, hit them with artillery, or tanks and wipe them out. Just then Lt. Springer, the artillery observer arrived and he and his men dove into the bunker with Bouck because of the intense German fire. Lt. Springer was

able to get a few rounds onto the approach to Lanzerath, but their jeep radios were soon hit and out of commission. The rounds did little in slowing the German advance. It was about 10:30 that morning.

The twenty two men, outnumbered at least twenty to one, couldn't believe it when the Germans attacked straight up the hill at them, coming in tight groups. Lt. Bouck's platoon just mowed them down. When some of the soldiers hit the ground to try and keep from getting hit, a German officer or sergeant would yell at them and they would stand up and advance into the American fire.

Bill James, nineteen years old, sprinted to the jeep and started sweeping the hillside with the .50 cal. machine gun mounted there. "Those kids...were eighteen and nineteen, just like me...it was so painful I had to divorce the faces from the action, and just fire at the movement." Lt. Bouck didn't have any such qualms. The Germans were coming up to kill them. If they wanted to walk up in crowded formations it just made them better targets.

The firefight had lasted perhaps thirty seconds. Almost all the attackers had been killed or wounded. The men couldn't imagine why the Germans hadn't hit them with artillery, mortars, not even a machine gun.

In the lull one of the men took the .50 cal. off the jeep and brought it into the dugout for more directional firing. Again they came straight up the hill with some starting to go around the flanks now, but the Americans again shot them down. But there were so many of them some of Bouck's platoon were getting hit but kept firing. One had been hit in the jaw by a well aimed rifle grenade fired through the bunker slit, but failed to explode. It severely wounded the American but he kept on. Then another company of Germans started advancing up the hill. This time the Americans started aiming their M-1s at the Germans' heads, killing them or stopping them cold and conserving ammo. Finally the surviving Germans fell back behind some farm buildings. A German lifted a white flag and walked up the hill, requesting time to remove their wounded from the hill. Bouck agreed and for the next hour as the German medics tended to their wounded as Bouck's platoon Sgt. Slap went around distributing ammunition and encouragement.

The third attack began and soon bodies were stacked up against a barbed wire fence crossing the field about midway up the hill. Now though mortars started to be used against them, they weren't very effective. Bouck's platoon kept taking careful aim at the Germans to make their fire more effective and conserve ammo.

Many of the Germans received head or heart shots and none made it past the fence that time. But Bouck's platoon was down to a few clips per man and couldn't hold out much longer. He got on his radio to regimental headquarters, telling them he was surrounded, when a bullet blew the radio out of his hand. He was on his own. He hoped then to get his men out at dark, but the Germans finally overwhelmed them on the sides, taking casualties as they did so, and when Bouck's position was totally surrounded, called for the Americans to surrender. There was nothing further to do. As they walked down the hill with the German soldiers, one of the German's exclaimed with great sadness, looking at all the bodies of the enemy soldiers Lt. Bouck and his men had killed, "Mein Comrades!" Lt. Bouck said nothing.

Lt. Bouck and the rest of the Americans came out into captivity and to months long nightmares of deprivation, freezing cold, being packed into filthy boxcars and POW camps with terrible conditions and rations from a Nazi regime that was collapsing. But the men had held against impossible odds and held up the German advance in their sector at a tremendous cost to the German plans.

Jochen Pieper with his point tanks stormed through the Baugnez crossroads, headed toward the village of Stavelot where they were to cross their first main, natural obstacle, the Ambleve River. About then a convoy of about thirty trucks from Battery B of the American 285<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion left Baugnez in the direction of Malmedy. The trucks were fired upon by Pieper's point tanks. The men piled out seeking cover but were soon captured by a German unit commanded by Major Joseph Diefenthal, one of Pieper's most trusted officers.

Pieper was several miles past Baugnez when the Germans herded 131 men, plus some American medics and MPs who had recently been directing traffic into eight rows in a field about sixty feet from the road. A German officer thought to be Major Werner Poetschke, commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> SS Panzer Battalion, ordered two Mark IV tanks to guard the prisoners then ordered one of the tank commanders to open fire. The officer raised his pistol and shot an American medic and jeep driver dead. The rest of the POWs tried standing fast, to not give the enemy an excuse as shooting escaping POWs. But the Germans opened fire with machine guns raking the gathered prisoners until all were still. The SS moved on. Then the 3<sup>rd</sup> SS Pioneer Company entered the field, finishing off the wounded with pistols and rifle butts. A few had managed to escape, a few successfully played dead and weren't shot to escape later, and some who escaped were in American lines within an hour. Some German units that passed by afterwards would shoot a few rounds into the body covered field. The rest of the bodies weren't uncovered from under the snow that soon covered them until two months later. Strangely, in the midst of chaos, word of the massacre spread like wildfire across and throughout the American combat units. What was once a well equipped, well trained, and determined American Army was all of those and also now one mad as hell.

The 333<sup>rd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, a racially segregated U.S. Army unit of African-Americans, with white officers commanding, as was typical, were equipped with 155mm howitzers, landed in Normandy early July '44, and saw continuous combat throughout the summer. They initially supported the 2<sup>nd</sup> Inf. Division, and its replacement the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. In October 1944 they were in Schoenberg, Belgium near St. Vith. With the rapid advancement of the German attack, most of the 333<sup>rd</sup> were ordered to retreat west to Bastogne, while C Battery and Service Battery were to remain to support the 14<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment and 106<sup>th</sup> Division.

As the Service Battery tried to displace through St. Vith it was hit by heavy German armored and small arms fire. Many were killed and captured. Eleven men escaped into the woods to hide near Wereth, Belgium, when Belgium farmer Mathias Langer offered them shelter. The area had been German for hundreds of years until World War I had made it part of Belgium. The wife of a German soldier who lived in Wereth told the men of the notorious 1<sup>st</sup> SS Division, the same at the Malmady massacre, that black American soldiers were hiding in their village. They were surrounded, marched into the woods, beaten, brutally tortured with rifle butts breaking bones, and stabbed with bayonets, and then shot. Their frozen bodies were discovered six weeks later when the Allies recaptured the area.

The 333<sup>rd</sup> that had made it to Bastogne provided fire support for the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division during the siege of Bastogne, for which they and also the 969<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion received the President unit Citation, the Army's highest unit award.

After the war a memorial to the Wereth Eleven was formally dedicated.

The Germans also perpetrated murder on civilians. In the Belgium village of Stavelot the same German unit accused civilians of sheltering Americans, and systematically executed sixty men, forty seven women, and twenty three children.



## Chapter Sixty Two

The Second Engineer Battalion units were escaping and evading and fighting a rear guard action in freezing cold, as they went from basement to basement and different places for cover from the German shells and enemy soldiers invading through their sectors. As the enemy soldiers came around a building or came into view through a window, the soldiers would fire at them, killing or wounding them; temporarily halting or driving them back, only to have more enemy press on toward them relentlessly.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was in a full scale attack when the Germans hit their lines. The worst hit was the 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, an already prior depleted infantry division with many new replacements. Small scale unit stands by men who stood and died bought precious time for the 99<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions to fall back and regroup in Elsenborn town up on Elsenborn Ridge.

In the next 14 hours, the Indianhead Division, achieved what had to be done, what to some military textbooks said was impossible. Against two powerful German divisions it did a complete turnabout from the offensive to a well organized daylight withdrawal and met the threat against their flank and rear, then slammed the door in Rundstedt's face.

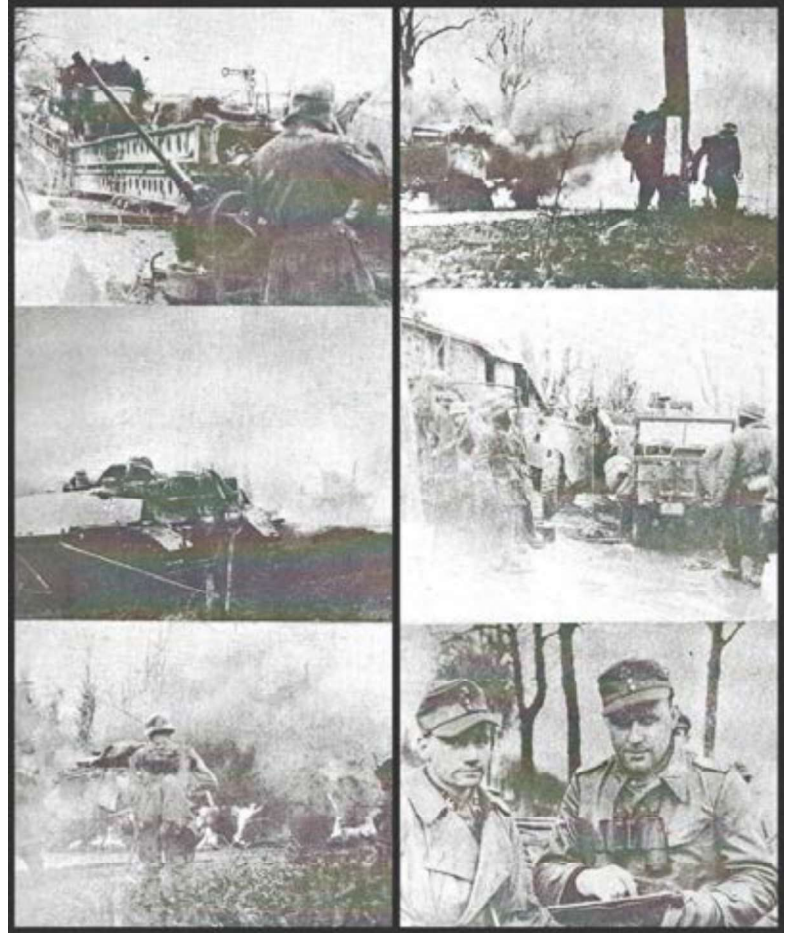
Years before General Robertson had become an expert on daylight withdrawals. He quickly mapped out such a plan. Col. Chester Hirschfelder of San Antonio, Texas, the 9<sup>th</sup>'s infantry regiment's commander, was placed in charge of the disengagement and withdrawal. Col. Ginder of San Diego, gathered all available men to coordinate defenses southwest of Wirtzfeld where the Division CP was threatened.

Col. John Stokes, Asst. Div. Cmdr. from Freeold, New Jersey, was put in charge of all troops in the Rocherath and Krinkelt area. Division HQ was alerted for defense of the CP, now in immediate danger of being overrun. German tanks and infantry were pouring through the disrupted lines of the 99<sup>th</sup> Div. into Bullingen, two miles from Wirtzfeld, where the Second Engineer Company, Second Signal Company, and Second Quartermaster Company were located.



German soldiers advancing past burning American jeep.

Pictures of various Nazi units advancing through the Ardennes and attacking Americans at Krinkelt, Wertzfelt, Rocherath, Bullingen, and other towns.



When the first contingent of enemy tanks and infantrymen lunged into Bullingen, one group of engineers held them off until the majority of their force could evacuate. This group made their way to a battalion of riflemen and joined in a counterattack on a German held town.

Some of the engineers managed to infiltrate out, but one group went into the cellars and kept up the battle. They were ordered out two days later when artillery from both sides made the area a No Man's Land. Twelve members of the Second Signal Company concealed themselves in a cellar with the Germans occupying the upper floors. They were forced to strangle their pet dog to keep from being discovered. They got out in the dark. The Second Quartermaster Company lost all its supplies and managed to get out only a few trucks when the panzer thrust hit the town. Some of the men took off through the deep snow covered fields. Nine hid in a creamery vault and watched the Germans loot American supplies. They got out that night and crept back to American lines. Pop and some of his men scrambled into basements and between lulls in the German artillery fire continued evading the enemy. They did this through Wirtzfeld, Bullingen, and soon Krinkelt, firing at the enemy when they could as they rallied briefly with other units.

Overpowering small division forces in Bullingen, hostile armor and infantry from the crack 1<sup>st</sup> SS Panzer Division swept on toward Wirtzfeld where the Second Division HQ personnel rallied to stem the attack until the arrival of infantrymen from the 23<sup>rd</sup> Regiment. When enemy tanks appeared on the skyline barely 600 yards from the Division CP and opened fire on Wirtzfeld, Gen. Robertson said: "We are going to hold this CP." The Div. HQ platoon, cooks, clerks, and orderlies proceeded to do just that against tanks and troops, with Gen. Robertson himself helping to direct traffic despite enemy tank and artillery fire. Two enemy tanks and an armored car were knocked out in the first five minutes of the battle.

Only one road from Wirtzfeld to Elsenborn could now be used by the Division. Everything was headed one way. Some holes in the road were so deep and muddy jeeps often had to be winched through them. The burden of maintaining the traffic flow fell to the Division MPs. Enemy artillery and long range small arms fire was falling constantly, but they stood by their post keeping traffic moving, pushing stalled vehicles off the road, until the covering force from the 741<sup>st</sup> Tank Battalion was ready to pull out and the MPs withdraw.

German's Fifth and Sixth Panzer Armies broke through at Manderfeld. One column of armor, with Paratroops riding the tanks broke into Bullingen, overran B Company of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion commanded by Lt. Bunnis, the Division Signal and Quartermaster Dumps and headed into Wirtzfeld.

Enemy tanks reached within one thousand yards of the Engineer Battalion CP and American Tank Destroyers put up a desperate, vicious battle with them all morning, blasting at the enemy tanks with everything they had.

The battle raged all day to keep the Division rear from being cut off. C Company Engineers placed mines, abatis, and craters on the old road they had just improved to the Heart Break Crossroads front as they retreated with the 38<sup>th</sup> Inf. Reg. back to Krinkelt. "A" Company was thrown into the line with the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment to prevent a breakthrough from Krinkelt. The 38<sup>th</sup> Regiment fought a vicious battle all night hand to hand with enemy tanks and infantry in Krinkelt. The Engineer Battalion hiked out of town at 1500 hours and sent the equipment back to Camp Elsenborn. C Company made it back to Elsenborn with only the loss of one truck. Both A and C set up roadblocks with C laying mines, and stood ready to be used as infantry. Some of B Company engineer men who had escaped capture infiltrated back through enemy lines.

However, Capt. Hennie, Lt. Buschow, two other officers, and seventy enlisted men of B Company and all but six trucks were lost in Bullingen, with most captured. From Lt. Col. Snetzer's diary:

"Infantry held on desperately as wrecked forces of 99<sup>th</sup> Div. flees back thru our lines. First Div. has been thrown into breach on our right where 99<sup>th</sup> use to be. This seems to be a serious breakthrough by the Germans. Rain and mud again as snow melts. This is the grimmest it has ever been for the 2<sup>nd</sup>."

Col. Jay B. Lovless of San Antonio, Texas became commander of all troops in the Sourbrodt-Elsenborn area after his three battalions were split between the 99<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions. His group, consisting of regular riflemen and rear echelon clerks, cooks, bandsmen, and drivers defended the area South of Elsenborn and prepared defenses East of Berg, Belgium to which the Division's soldiers could fall back to when necessary.

The full force of the Germans hit the two divisions from three sides on the morning of December 18 with Lt. Col. McKinley's battalion staging a gallant fight to hold the important

crossroads just outside of Rocherath. The onrushing tanks and infantry were met with bazookas, cans of gasoline, and phosphorous grenades while hasty mine fields helped to slow the progress of the 12<sup>th</sup> SS Panzer Division. The Nazis threw masses of men and tanks at the 9<sup>th</sup>'s sector. So severe was the battle for these crucial crossroads that First Lt. Stephen Truppner's company, which had been reduced to just 50 men, called for artillery on his own position. The last words from him were, "Artillery is coming in fine." Only 12 men from this company escaped. Lt. Truppner was not among them.

The savage back and forth fighting continued all day around Rocherath and Krinkelt. Pvt. Isabel Salzar, Houston, Texas, a cook's helper, left his pots long enough to knock out two German tanks with a bazooka and helped create a road block against the other German tanks.

Riflemen from the 38<sup>th</sup>'s Company F commanded by Capt. John Dumont, San Antonio, Texas fought off three enemy tank and infantry attacks leaving an estimated 75 enemy dead.

In this jumbled battlefield T/Sgt. Frank (Hardtack) Kviateck, the oldest enlisted man in the 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, was captured when his machine gun section was overrun. He was the sharpshooter who had started knocking off German soldiers in Normandy and vowed to kill 45 of them in retaliation for his two brothers being killed in Italy. He had 36 notches on his rifle when captured.

All through the night of the 18<sup>th</sup> and day of the 19<sup>th</sup> the enemy attacked relentlessly. The Division, now in contact with all its units, fought an organized but desperate defense. On the night of the 19<sup>th</sup> the Division pulled out of Krinkelt and set up defenses on Elsenborn Ridge. By morning of the 20<sup>th</sup> it was concluded that one section of Rundstedt's sweep toward Antwerp had been halted after one of the hardest fought battles along the entire First Army Front. As an example the First Battalion of the 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment, in fighting their delaying action in front of Rocherath, reached Elsenborn with only 217 out of a total strength of 860 men.

During the action Pfc. Jose M. Lopez, 33, from Brownsville, Texas killed more than 100 Germans. On Dec 17 the enemy was breaking through his company's left flank. He lugged his machine gun across the company front, setting up in a shallow hole, immediately cutting down 10 Nazis. When a German tank approached and started firing its 88mm gun and machine gun at him, ignoring it, he killed 25 Germans following it. Enemy foot troops had begun penetrating his company's lines from the rear, Lopez, still ignoring the tank fire, move his gun back and halted wave after wave of enemy forces. He kept firing even after tank fire concussion hit nearby, knocking him over. As his company withdrew he dropped back 100 yards and kept firing until he was out of ammo, then rejoined his company. He lived and was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Young, married, T/4, Truman Kimbro of Madisonville, Texas of Company C of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Eng. Bn. was lead scout in a squad given the job of mining or blocking a highly important crossroad well in front of U.S. lines. On one of the approach roads a column of German tanks were rushing to join the furious enemy assault on the town of Krinkelt. It would have been disastrous if those enemy armored monsters got in among Pop and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion along with the rest of the Germans soldiers coming with them.

Once in sight of the intersection T/4 Kimbro found it occupied by a German Tiger tank and 20 well dug in infantrymen. He tried different approaches but the Germans remained and the task appeared impossible. In full view of the enemy tank and infantry Kimbro crawled to a road leading to the crossroad where the column of German Panzers were charging down,

and began to lay the mines right in front of the German tank's paths. Heavy fire rained down severely wounding him, but he continued placing the mines across the road. On his attempting to draw back the fire became even heavier and he was hit innumerable times. The machine gun bursts actually rolled his body. The mines exploded under some of the enemy tanks, delaying the enemy armor long enough to permit U.S. forces to successfully evacuate to Rocherath and helped keep the enemy from attacking the rear of the Division forces moving back. 19 year old Truman Kimbro was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, posthumously.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Inf. Division artillery played a crucial role during this time and later. Massed artillery from the Division's battalion batteries resulted in staggering losses to the enemy. When the enemy first struck the rear of the division, the artillery battalions were supporting the infantry attack from extreme forward positions. In order to give supporting fire to the rear where the Division CP was being attacked, the 12<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup> artillery battalions, on orders from General John H. Hinds, the Division artillery commander of San Antonio, Texas, each turned one battery around, placing fire on enemy tanks and infantry within 800 yards of the CP, while continuing to support infantry attempting to disengage from their forward attack positions. The 38<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery alone fired 5,000 rounds on December 18<sup>th</sup>.

Other American divisions poured down on the side of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Inf. to hold the Germans. The front line troops were taking heavy enemy shelling but were destroying plenty of enemy tanks.



German Panther tanks burning from American's fighting back.

German air attacks also wiped out the Division's medical section on Elsenborn, killing doctors and medical aides.

The 38<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> withdrew from Krinkelt and Wirtzfeld during the night of the 19<sup>th</sup>. "Hell broke out in every direction. Div. Rear Echelon has been on reserve as Inf. for two days to prevent a breakthrough." Lt. Col. Snetzer relates.

The Presidential Unit Citation award to the Second Engineer Battalion outlines it well.

"The Second Engineer Combat Battalion is cited for outstanding performance of duty in action against the enemy during the period of 13 December 1944 to 20 December 1944 in area around Wirtzfeld, Belgium. As its initial assignment, the Battalion proceeded to remove

numerous road blocks, obstacles, and minefields on the only available supply road for the attack of the Division. (This was the road up to Heartbreak Corner.) This work was done under heavy artillery and mortar fire, within sight of the enemy, against adverse winter weather and over snow blanketed minefields. This road was cleared and opened up abreast, or even ahead, of the assaulting infantry troops advancing in woods on either side.

With the sudden German counter offensive in the West, one company of the Battalion was caught from the rear in bivouac at Bullingen and suffered severe casualties. Pulling itself together, this company furiously fought back against the German armored spearhead, destroying several tanks and many infantrymen. Pocketed elements held out for three days, thought completely surrounded, until all ammunition and food was exhausted, when they were finally overcome.

Still other elements of the Battalion were twice thrown into the line as the only infantry reserves to withstand the German push in the rear flank of the Second Division. Another company constructed a final barrier and obstacle belt behind the withdrawing infantry. Mines, road blocks, and demolition were placed under heavy enemy fire and amidst infiltrating enemy infantry on all sides, thus delaying his armored pursuit of our withdrawal.

Without rest from duties of clearing roads for advance, fighting as infantry, and placing road blocks and obstacles for withdrawal, the Second Engineer Combat Battalion took up its all important mission of keeping the only escape route for the Division open. This was a newly constructed on-way road across swamps and hills with, in spite of severest conditions of melting snow and drizzling rain, was kept passable for the unending columns of tanks and trucks of the major part of the two Divisions with had to withdraw over this route..."

20 December - From Lt. Col. Snetzer's diary.

"Germans continuing to pour on the fire. We are fighting desperately on entire 1<sup>st</sup> Army front. 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. front seems to be stabilized for now. 12<sup>th</sup> Panzer Div. failed to get thru our sector but 1<sup>st</sup> Panzer (SS) Div. has penetrated deep into Belgium in sector right beside us. It appears both V and VI Panzer Armies have been thrown against 1<sup>st</sup> Army. The days are short and cloudy, continual fog and mud, as temperature is now above freezing. K ration is the menu these days; all mail is thing of the past as APO personnel fight in the line. Christmas is not even thought of. In one week of violent action just ended, Bn suffered 25% casualties, with four Officers missing in Action. 144 Enlisted Men killed, missing in action or otherwise casualized out of total strength of 598 as we went into action."

Once up on Elsenborn Pop and Lt. Col. Snetzer are trying to reorganize B Company, getting in new recruits and putting them right into the company, right in the middle of the battle. An enemy air attack of strafing and bombing on Camp Elsenborn, wiped out the Eng. Bn. motor section, killing 9 men and wounding 3. The remnants of B Company were moved back to Verviers for reorganizing and refitting with the new recruits and replacement equipment.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 99<sup>th</sup> U.S. Divisions dug in on the Ridge just as the Germans started the first of numerous savage attacks up its approaches. The Germans couldn't leave such an outpost of American arms on its flanks and in its rear. Enemy artillery was pounding the town of Elsenborn and the whole Ridge area.

Jochen Peiper's spearhead was well through the valley below Elsenborn and approaching the critical village of Trois Ponts, named for the three bridges across the Ambleve River, two of which could support Peiper's heavy vehicles and tanks.

Peiper had to pass through the village and cross one of the two bridges to access Belgian route N-23, a fast wide road to take him within hours of his final objective, the Muse River. From there the German plan was to consolidate their attack and continue on to Antwerp to recapture the major Allied supply port.

Since leaving Lanzerath, roadblocks, spirited defense from the Americans, heavy shelling and air strikes had reduced Kampfgruppe Peiper to two thirds of its initial strength. All had thrown increasing delays into Peiper's time schedule.

Late that morning Peiper's lead tank, a Panther, heading toward the first of the bridges, was hit suddenly by an American 57mm antitank gun. The Panther lost a track but fired back, killing all four of the gun crew. Seconds later a roar and crash was of the bridge being blown up by American engineers. Right after that the second of Trois Ponts' bridges was blown up.

The nearest bridge now was below the village La Gleize, at a river crossing called Cheneux, entailing yet another delay he could ill afford. The bridge there might not even support his tanks, but it was the only shot he had. Soon scouts told him the bridge could support his tanks and they headed to Cheneux. By midafternoon however fierce attacks from P-47 Thunderbolts destroyed ten tanks at the rear of his column. Three of the American planes were shot down.

In a while Peiper's point tanks made it across the bridge at Cheneux, but strafing by Thunderbolts had immobilized several half tracks and Panthers, blocking the road. He ordered Cheneux bypassed to cross another bridge over the Lienne Creek at Habimont if he was to still access N-23 and make it to the Muse. Just then American engineers began to wire that bridge.

Corporal Fred Chapin of the 291<sup>st</sup> Engineer Combat Battalion, spotted Peiper's lead tank, as it and others rounded a bend two hundred yards from the bridge. Chapin had his hand on the switch as he looked anxiously for his Lieutenant while they finished wiring the bridge. Finally he saw the signal and in a flash of thundering blue light and masonry the bridge collapsed into the Lienne. Peiper's last doorway to the Meuse had closed. "The damn engineers!" Peiper was said to have uttered as his tanks withdrew.



## Chapter Sixty Three

Mother said this was a bleak Christmas season for everyone back in the U.S. Everyone knew there was a huge battle going on in Europe and that our boys were right in the middle of it, and she knew Pop was in the middle of it too. Practically everyone either had a relative in the battle or knew someone who did. Texas especially had a lot of boys right in the action in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division. She and Pop had been exchanging letters the whole time, and had gotten really close and were starting to talk seriously. However, as a pretty wartime nurse she had gotten eight serious proposals of marriage.

She had gone into nursing school in 1942 upon graduating from high school. She went at the end of that summer to the largest hospital in Ft. Worth, John Peter Smith, and didn't come home to visit until Christmas. She was there for two years completing training and working as an Army nurse. On Saturday nights they were the only ER open in the whole county to service airforce base, an army base, the massive Ft. Worth stock yards, a large Mexican quarter, and the city of Ft. Worth itself. She said the ER on Saturday night was always hopping, basically a mad house, especially on a full moon.

After two years there she was transferred to McCloskey in Ft. Hood, Texas. She was already treating war wounded in Ft. Worth but in McCloskey she started treating a lot of them as they came back from being wounded overseas.

When soldiers had a limb blown off the doctors on site would clean and bandage the stump and insert a couple of maggots into the bandage to keep the wound clean and the dead flesh cleaned off the wound surface. Then they would be shipped back to the states and to McCloskey, the hospital there at Ft. Hood, where she was at. She said when they first removed the bandage on her end the smell would take your head off.

A twenty five year old fighter pilot, a full bird colonel, pretty full of himself, had survived a plane crash but it left him paralyzed from the neck down. He could do nothing. His outsized ego, necessary for the confidence level of his missions, experienced severe, blunt force trauma to his whole self esteem and personality. No one could do anything with him. He would cuss a blue streak to anyone coming into his room. Finally Mother for the first time

attended him. He started his usual ranting and cussing. Mom promptly washed his mouth out with soap. From then on when he got down or wanted help on something he always called for Mom. Sometime later another service man came in who had suffered a similar fate was from a very wealthy family. When time came for them to take him home to facilities that would provide good, lifetime care for him, they also took the young colonel with them.

As an Army nurse during a world war Mom and her group did everything; surgery, ER, burn victims, rehabilitation, psych patients. She said some of the patients from combat would get very agitated and they would put them in hot baths to help calm them down.

Once she was working surgery when a top surgery specialist was visiting and helping out with some difficult cases. The specialist had brought his personal nurse with Mom assisting them. All during the surgery the doctor would cuss as he used their surgical instruments. They had been used over and over and were worn and not as sharp as better, newer instruments were. The surgery room was on the third floor of the hospital, and when they finished he said to his personal nurse, "Nurse, take those damn things and throw them out the window!"

She promptly gathered all the surgical tools up in a tray, walked to the window, opened it, and threw the whole tray out the window. She turned around, dusted her hands and said, "Anything else doctor?" Mom said they were really happy about it because they could now requisition for a whole new set of surgical equipment. As a government institution otherwise they were to use what they had to make it last way beyond what a private place would.

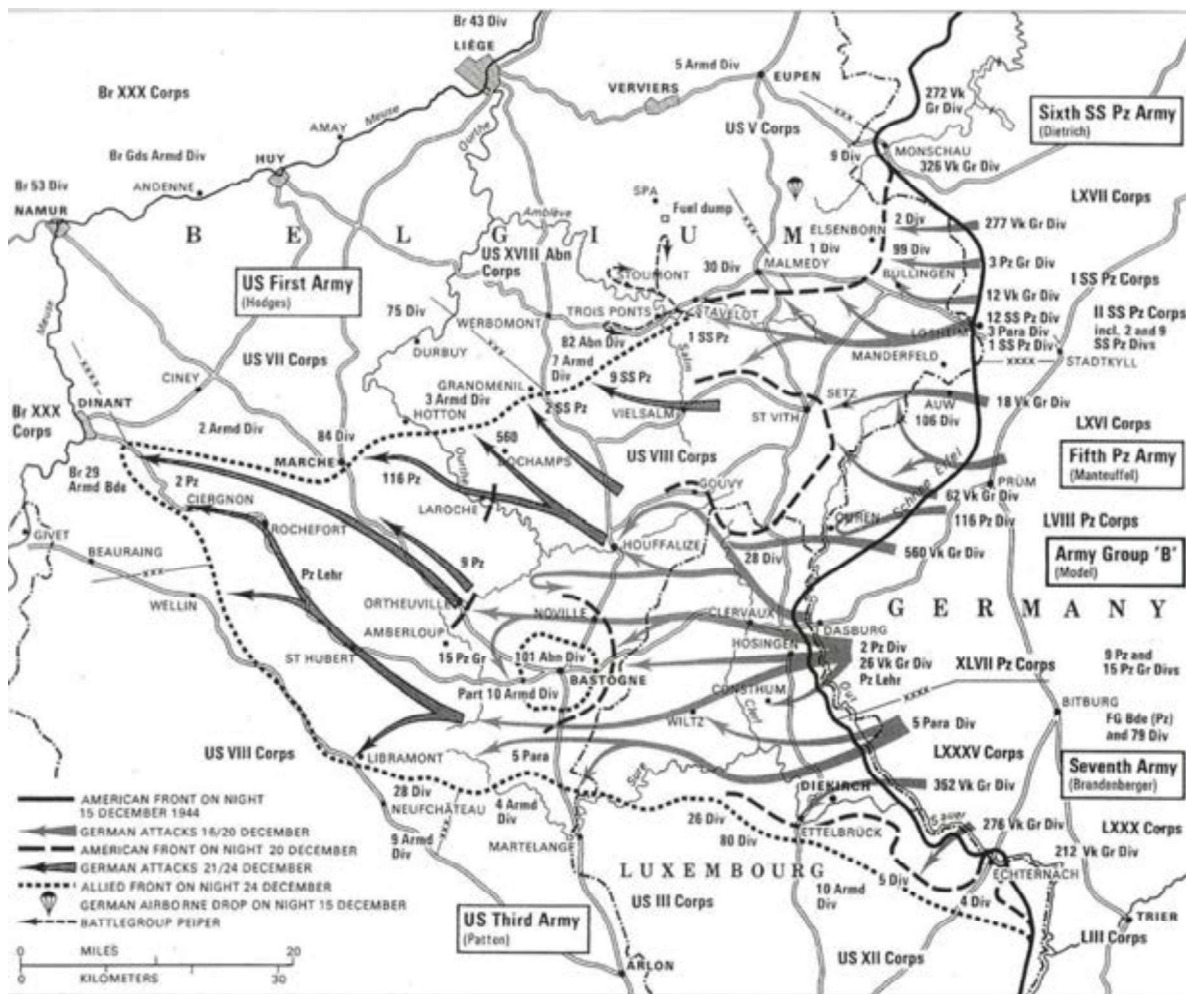
A hot poker game seemed to be perpetually in play on the enlisted men's ward above where Mother often worked. The Military Police were always trying to bust it up as technically gambling wasn't allowed on the base and certainly not in the hospital. After they'd pass her station Mom would take a broom and rap the ceiling above her to notify the boys that the law was on its way, giving them plenty of time to cease activities until the MPs were gone.

Some top commanding general was visiting and all the Ft. Hood medical units were to pass in review. Mom and her fellow nurses had worked all kinds of hours with shift work during all days of the week. They had never been trained to march. So they got out in the parking lot training with some Army person there to get them into shape, but the man soon realized it was a hopeless cause. Their officers at the hospital didn't know what to do with them, as they couldn't be left out of the review. So Mom and all the nurses sat on the reviewing stand right along with the general and the rest of the commanders.

## Chapter Sixty Four

The weather was the coldest in forty years in Belgium, the snow two feet deep, four in many places with deepening drifts. The German point thrust with Peiper's Group had bypassed Pop's area, leaving following enemy units to deal with Pop, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 99<sup>th</sup> Divisions.

A V-1 buzz bomb landed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's Ordinance Company with a terrific explosion causing heavy casualties and wrecking the motor section. This was after the motor section had been previously bombed by enemy air. Other V-1s were landed along the front and behind it. Both the 9<sup>th</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup> Regiments finally had pulled back upon the Elsenborn Ridge after vicious fighting back through Rocherach and Krinkelt. There had been only one rutted road that both the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry had to use. Some men made it back through the woods in twos and threes. The Germans struck Elsenborn Ridge immediately just as the American soldiers had barely started digging in.



Area map of the Bulge Battle. The Germans attacked the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 99<sup>th</sup> Divisions through Wirtzfeld, Rocherach, Krinkelt, Bullingen, Dom Butgenbach and through roads and forests. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had to suddenly pull out of a major attack further north and perform a fighting retreat while pulling back to Elsenborn Ridge. Vicious, sharp battles took place all over this area as massive enemy forces pushed through. Note the German lines had to bend around the Elsenborn area.

The Germans started shelling the Ridge again to soften up the Americans, then launched a savage attack up it. Bullets and mortars flew in profusion at the American units digging in on the Ridge. Finally higher American commanders were waking up to the seriousness of this massive German attack.

Bastogne, was a center of seven roads that fanned out, making it a crucial center of the German advance. The 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division had been rushed into the picturesque town right before the German advance had surrounded it.

German General Model desperately needed Bastogne to establish supply lines through the town to his forward units which were running out of fuel.

Various American units had retreated back to Bastogne to make a stand. The Germans had attacked at various times all around the perimeter. Thank goodness they hadn't attacked at once all around the position, as they didn't really have the forces on hand to

mount an all points charge. The Germans had swept over twenty miles past Bastogne toward the Meuse river, but they had Bastogne and also Elsenborn Ridge in their rear. They had offered surrender terms to the American commander at Bastogne, pointing out how surrounded and desperate his plight was and how his forces would be eliminated if he didn't surrender.

Brigadier General Anthony McAuliffe was the 101 Airborne artillery commander, but as Major General Maxwell Taylor, the commander of the 101<sup>st</sup> was away in the U.S. attending a conference, General McAuliffe was in full command in General Taylor's absence. His reply to the German ultimatum was the now famous "Nuts". The American forces around Bastogne dug in and held on.

In the valley below the Elsenborn Ridge German units rushed through to try continuing exploiting the breakthrough.

Eisenhower called all the Allied commanders together to see what could be done in a concerted manner to halt the German penetration, especially relieving the troops surrounded at Bastogne.

The only commander who was prepared to help was General George Patton, telling the rest of the commanders, and Eisenhower, that he could attack with three divisions in forty eight hours. Ike said emphatically, "Be realistic George.", with Patton replying he was. (In the movie "Patton", it shows Bedel Smith, General Eisenhower's chief of staff saying this, but it was Eisenhower who did.) General Patton was given the green light to do so.

Patton pulled his Third Army divisions out of a major winter attack, turned them ninety degrees, and attacked toward Bastogne with 20,000 men and their tanks, TDs, weapons, vehicles, and equipment. It was tank tactics firing and advancing as fast as they could against fierce German resistance and brutal cold as they started fighting their way in the direction of Bastogne.

A classmate's of Pop's '42 Texas A&M graduating class, Robert "Bob" Bruce, was in the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division which spearheaded Patton's Third Army's drive to Bastogne. In tough fighting they made their way toward the beleaguered crossroads town.

Now on the Elsenborn Ridge not only was the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 99<sup>th</sup> artillery batteries getting set up and starting to fire, the V Corps started bringing all the artillery weapons that are part of their artillery batteries. These were 240 mm and 8 inch guns. They could propel these large shells up to twenty five miles away, covering the entire valley spread out below. The Ridge is a dominating terrain feature overlooking the twin cities of Krinkelt and Rocherath, where the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineers and the Division had fought such deadly contests.

Pop and the rest of the 2<sup>nd</sup> had dug in as best they could. German shells continued to pound the whole Ridge area.

Pop was out checking the area approaches in his sector. One of the Division's antitank vehicles was guarding an approach road coming up toward them. The road came from around a wooded hill. The antitank gun had positioned himself back up the draw toward the Ridge where he was mostly concealed but still could fire on the road as it curled the around the hill.

Suddenly a German tank came around the bend and up toward them. The American fired, hitting the tank, blowing it up. Another tank came right behind it and the young American in charge of the antitank gun fired, explosion and flames burst from it, knocking it out. A third tank came rapidly around them, swiveling and twisting, trying to spot the gun that had knocked out its two companions.

It was too late, the antitank gun fired and the third tank exploded into flames. Pop was really cheering him on. After losing three tanks the Germans sent no more up that road that day.

The Germans were behind on all their schedules and initially couldn't leave such a dangerous placement of enemy troops behind and on their flank. They fired mortars and artillery up at the ridge from various locations below.

German air power made a bombing run on the Ridge, killing or wounding the entire 2<sup>nd</sup> Division medical battalion. It was a terrible loss. The Division motor pool had already been virtually wiped out by German air.

All action took place during continuous freezing, biting cold. In his ground bunker Pop tried every way but just couldn't get his feet warm. They were like the weather, continually freezing. The Army wool blankets were pretty thin. The terrible, biting cold never loosened its grip.

He'd wrap his feet in them but it didn't have any real effect. In time his toenails turned black and all fell off. The air overhead was full of tracer bullets and German mortars and artillery shells exploding over the whole Ridge area. But things were getting hotter and hotter for the Germans rushing units in the valley below as they tried moving more tanks and units toward Bastogne and beyond to the Meuse River and Antwerp, their ultimate objective.

On December 20 Pop was given new orders: take over the remnants of Engineer Company B, reform the company and command it. Reforming an entire Army company in the middle of a major battle was a tough time to do so. But Pop went on with the job, organizing the men he had, checking in a few new replacements, putting them into platoons, and issuing orders to fully organize the company into an effective unit. Importantly he had a few experienced non-coms around which he could rebuild the platoon and squads that formed the company. One of the most important was First Sergeant Fontenot. 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. Fontenot was a full blood Louisiana Cajun, regular Army.

He had been in the Army for twenty years and in his position was in charge of all the enlisted men and non-coms in B Company. He would also help guide the new replacement officers coming in, helping them come into their roles and help keep them and their men alive. Pop was responsible for all that for all the company. But for now they had to live through the current conflagration.

They moved the remnants of B Company back to Verviers for reorganizing and equipment replacement and then moved the company back up to the line.

Right in the middle of this huge battle somehow some mail managed to get through. Pop got a notice from the Department of the Army that he owed around \$1,800 from the time he signed off on an engineer company's inventory when the Eng. Battalion and the whole 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was moving from Ft. Sam Houston, Texas to Wisconsin. He couldn't believe it. His friend, Capt. Freddy Valentino also got one. Pop said he almost felt like telling them to just come and get him. They made it over to Lt. Col. Snetzer to see what could be done. He signed off for both of them, telling the Army they were released from any obligation and owned nothing.

The next few days on Elsenborn are described in Lt. Col.'s diary.

December 21 – "Artillery is continual and terrific on both sides. Guns belch angrily night and day as sky is lighted at night and ground quivers with violent explosions. Germans are throwing back as much artillery as we and all rear areas as well as front are being heavily shelled. Snowed again in night and all is white... Enemy continues to attack on all sides far to south big push continues deep into Belgium and approaching France."

23 Dec – "Artillery fire continues uninterruptedly on both sides. My God it is an awesome sight and sound to live with this constant wrath of the Gods of War. It is cold and crisp and clear today and all is covered with snow. Great aerial battles were waged high in the sky only revealed to us by long white vapor trails of the soaring specks that were planes. German push is stopped in our immediate sector and First Army is back in 21<sup>st</sup> A.G. under F.M. Montgomery as all resources of allies are massed to stop and throw back Von Rundsted's all out push"

General Patton had ordered a chaplain in his HQ to write a prayer for clear weather. It worked. On the 23<sup>rd</sup>, the weather clears enough for the Allied superior air power to come into play, with American fighterbombers hitting the German armored columns and supplying Bastogne by air drop. The air drop contained a secret weapon, the artillery proximity fuse. This allows the American artillery shells to burst above the German armor and infantry, causing much more damage than shells that hit the ground and then exploded.

Lt. Col Snetzer's Diary entries continue.

24 Dec – "Weather is crystal clear, and sharply cold. Great fleets of bombers flew over, enemy planes out strafing in area. Situation still stable on our front with ferocious artillery duels on both sides. Jerry is throwing in great amounts of heavy artillery all around us and has caused casualties to our Bn. Tonight our Christmas carols were sung by the belching guns as the very ground vibrates, the air itself heaves with the violent concussion and the beautiful azure blue sky is streaked with ugly flashes of red gun fire.

25 Dec Christmas dawned clear and cold with the air force out in great strength. The only clouds were the entwining vapor trails of fleets of bombers and fighters with them." Pop and his Battalion even had one German pilot parachute into their area after his plane was hit. The sector remained stable but frozen.

Elsenborn Ridge was fast becoming a major stand for the American Army. The American commanders ordered all available artillery, from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 99<sup>th</sup> Divisions, and soon artillery pieces that were part of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps, to keep gathering up on the Ridge. Finally there were 342 American artillery guns, with ample ammunition, firing at the German units sweeping through the valley below toward the American defenders at Bastogne, and also at the enemy attacking fiercely up toward them. By now German Col. Pieper's panzer columns had swept past Bastogne by thirty miles, and were only five miles from the Muse's bridges, their initial objective.

These enemy units following now to try and exploit the breakthrough were German armored, tank destroyers, mobile infantry and infantry units. Most were moving as fast as they could toward Bastogne and beyond. However, now they had to run an American gauntlet of hell fire, so they continued attacking Pop and his fellow soldiers on the Ridge, because the Americans were firing all guns all the time.



One later account tells of German units, many battalion size or larger moving through the area would read, "It was spotted by American artillery observers and fire was called in on the enemy unit. In two hours it ceased to exist as a functioning military unit." That's militarese for saying they were blown off the face of the Earth by American firepower.

Dad said those 342 artillery pieces fired day and night for three solid days. There were 105 mm, and the big guns, 155 mm, 240 mm, and 8 inch guns. The big guns fired in a radius fan up to 25 miles out. That meant they were hurling these massive, high explosive shells up on to targets up to 25 miles away, where they landed with a huge blasting force, again and again.

Days passed with the Germans attacking time and again up toward the Ridge to try and destroy Pop and his division. He said for three days and nights it was dangerous to stick oneself up out of your foxhole. But Dad and the men did have to get out of the foxholes and man the guns and serve on the line to fire at the enemy assaulting them. The Luftwaffe bombed and strafed supply routes and units of the Division on the Ridge. Some historical accounts don't mention the active German aerial assaults. Intense enemy artillery and rockets landed all over the Division area daily.

There was a terrible, constant cacophony of explosions all around, with tracer bullets stitching the air everywhere. By December 28 the terrible battle and terrible cold continued. Buzz bombs go over every five minutes toward London. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion suffered 4 to 5 casualties per day from being bombed, strafed, and shelled. This morning they continued to be subject to heavy enemy shelling, hitting the Elsenborn buildings and forcing everyone to live in basements. The Germans continued pouring in troops and building up in the deep south past the rear of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. Though the German drive slowed, it seems to be building up strength. The men grimly hung on as more of them were wounded and killed.



2<sup>nd</sup> Division machine gunner ready to fire on enemy. Foxhole in the snow during the battle.

Three more days of the same hellish battle and shelling continue, so the Engineer Battalion Hq. is moved back ten miles into French speaking Belgium, to escape continual shelling of old area. Front lines remain the same, with the temperature about twenty degrees and more snow. The battalion is positioned all over. Pop and Company B is in Verviers. December 31 Pop got 64 replacements to fit into and finish filling out Company B. Verviers,

where Company B is bivouacked is bombed today. Buzz bombs continuing frequently passing overhead.

The new engineer company recruits were rushed in to Company B, filling in the positions of the soldiers captured at Bullingen and those killed and wounded. The young men were hurried into the Company position and quickly assigned to squads and bunkers. It's safe to say most if not all were scared out of their wits a bit, but they were soldiers and had a duty. Some had training in removing mines, working with explosives, and building bridges, some didn't have any. Most received sudden, on the job training of the most intense kind.

After five days of bitter non-stop fighting Patton's 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division penetrated the enemy lines to enter Bastogne. Pop's friend and classmate Bob Bruce and the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division received the Presidential Unit Citation for their heroic action. But the fighting was far from over in the Bulge or against the German Army. Months of deadly combat lay ahead.

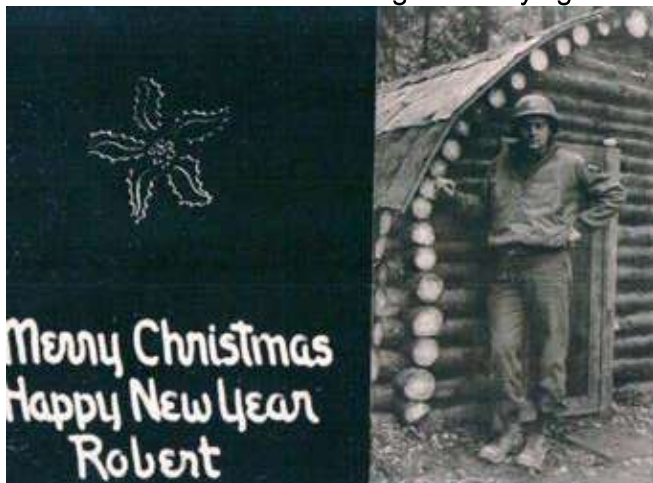
The 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division remained in line and contact with the enemy throughout the Elsenborn Defense. Enemy shelling remained heavy for weeks. Twice the enemy scored direct hits on the Regimental kitchen. Capt. Edward L. Farrel, Jr. Boston, Mass, led two patrols into no-man's-land and brought in a total of 17 German outpost guards without firing a shot. Soon after, three strong combat patrols cleaned out a section between Wirtzfeld and Bullingen, killing 39 Nazis and wounding many more.

New Year's Day eleven enemy planes strafed and bombed the division area. Several were shot down by the 462<sup>nd</sup> Anti-Aircraft Battalion gunners, who had been waging a hot fight against the aerial attacks. One pilot was captured.

The principal engineer activity was sanding roads and digging in some positions on the front lines. It is snowing daily. Reinforcements continue and the engineer companies are up to about 140 men each. "A" Company lost five men laying a 4,000 piece mine field.



On left 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. Engineers laying mines in heavy snow to guard against German attacks. On right firing at enemy as Americans started resuming the offensive.



Amid all the fighting Pop's sergeants somehow managed to get out a combined Christmas and New Year's card. The wear of the fighting shows on his face, looking years older than just 25.

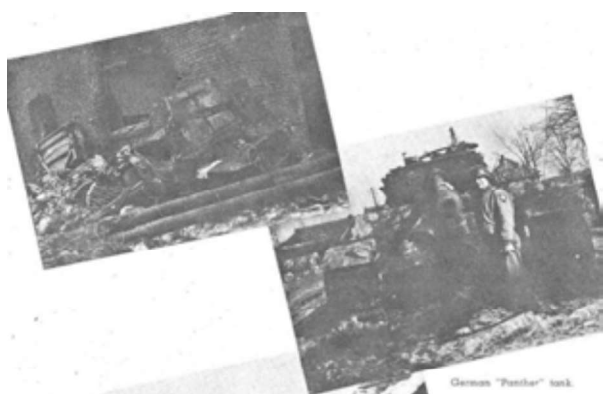
On 8 January a foot of snow fell in 24 hours, the Eng. Bn. is using everything available to keep roads plowed.

Toward the middle of the month German Nebelwerfer rockets appeared again on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. front, and riflemen began picking up enemy deserters who voluntarily walked into American lines.

On January 12 the 23<sup>rd</sup> Combat Team, consisting of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Regiment, the 37<sup>th</sup> FA Battalion and one company each from a TD Bn., a Tank Bn., and Pop's Company B of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Eng. Bn. and one from the Second Medical Bn. was ordered to the Weismes Ovifat vicinity to kick off an offensive with the First Infantry Division, to which they were attached. The 23<sup>rd</sup>'s objective was the Ondenval-Iveldinger Pass. Taking that enabled the 7<sup>th</sup> Armored Division to pass through and recapture St. Vith. Capt. Jack Tucker of Lufkin, Texas, having recuperated from being shot on the approach to Brest, came back to take over a company in the 23 Infantry Regiment and so was a part of the 23<sup>rd</sup> CT.

When they came down off the Ridge as part of the 23<sup>rd</sup> CT, Dad and his men for miles saw huge Tiger tanks blown apart, Panther Mark IVs, armored track carriers, and trucks were reduced to shattered hulks of smoldering metal. Bodies of enemy soldiers lay in grotesque rites of form where they died. Enemy tank destroyers and weapons were smashed all over.

Craters where the overwhelming American explosives landed were everywhere. The back of the Nazi thrust was crushed.



German Panther tank destroyed with 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. soldiers standing in front. Third from top: Main Street Bullingen after being recaptured by Americans.



In the attack now during five days of fighting the 23<sup>rd</sup> CT took 373 POWs, killed more than 500 and wounded a large number of enemy. Pop's B engineer company with half new recruits was busy removing mines,

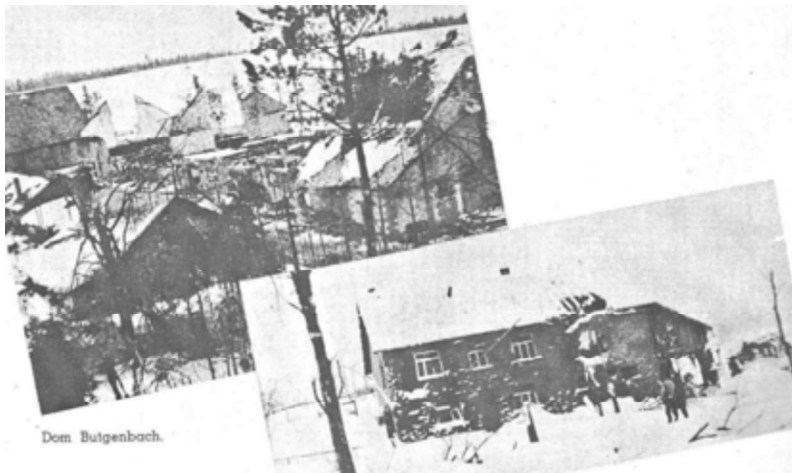
often under heavy fire. Pop and his officers and NCOs would have to try and train their raw recruits as best and as quickly as they could because they were all under pressure to

support the infantry in the 23<sup>rd</sup> CT. The mines had to be cleared to keep the infantry men from further casualties and enable them to maneuver.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> CT with B Company engineers is attached to 1<sup>st</sup> Div. and attacking due South through Faymonville to squeeze the German salient which is starting to withdraw from Allied pressure on all sides. B Company is now equipped to the same point as all the other engineer companies and each is short 2 dump trucks and a jeep. The winter weather continues with deep snow, freezing cold, and clouds.

G Company, of the 23<sup>rd</sup> CT, commanded by Capt. John H. Stephens of Tyler, Texas, entered the fighting with only 100 men and captured 150 enemy and killed 100 in four days of bitter fighting. Fighting in the sub freezing temperatures with only an occasional K ration reduced the company to 70 men. It kept on in tiny Eibertingen with house to house fighting firing at close range, exchanging grenades within houses, killing 50 enemy and taking 41 prisoners. A firing line of BARs, rifles, and artillery stopped an enemy counterattack before it could start, leaving 160 German dead.

On January 17 Lt. Col. Snetzer assumes command of the Second Engineer Battalion as Col. Warren is transferred to the 99<sup>th</sup> Div. as Chief of Staff. The 23<sup>rd</sup> Inf. with Pop and B Company attached continues attacking to the South with 1<sup>st</sup> Div. against stiff resistance and bad weather. Tank dozers were essential to their task as the snow that had to be cleared enough to allow vehicles to move, but hidden anti-tank mines took a toll on these machines. The rate of the entire attack was dependent on the Engineers clearing of the route forward. Pop set up B Company's CP in a house in Bullingen.



*Top: picture of Dom Butgenbach. Bottom right: picture of house in Bullingen where Pop had his B Company Engineer HQ when they went on the offensive as part of the 23 Combat Team.*

Col. Piper and his unit were reduced to just 300 men. Their tanks and armored vehicles had been continually attacked and out of gas. They wound up having to walk back toward Germany.

The largest land battle in the history of the U.S. Army killed 20,876 Allied soldiers, mostly Americans, with 42,893 wounded, 23,554 captured/missing. The Germans had 15,652 killed, with 41,600 wounded and 27,582 captured/missing. Deadly fighting continued without pause.

The area now gets hit with two days of a regular blizzard, bitter cold wind and blowing snow. The Fifth Corps MSR is snow blocked by high drifts all day. The Engineer Battalion is

using tank dozers, bulldozers, truck plows, and everything to keep continual blowing snow plowed back. Lt. Col. Snetzer's diary, "B" Company has done a fine job in offensive operations, clearing great numbers of snow buried mines and opening up road. 23<sup>rd</sup> now has reached their objective." Clearing mines buried two or more feet deep in snow was extremely dangerous. For the mines had been buried first in the ground and then further with the heavy snow, making detection much more difficult. Often it was a case of an engineer soldier probing with his bayonet through the snow and into the ground. After a road or field had been cleared, B Company's graders and dozers would plow them open. But not all mines were found.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion HQ was moved forward on 22 Jan to Ovifat, Belgium, near Elsenborn. The living conditions were tough on the men, having to make do with impromptu bunkers. Capt. Fred Valentino from San Antonio takes over as the Battalion S-3, Operations Officer. Joe Johnson took over as A Company commander.

On the 29th the 1<sup>st</sup> Div. took Bullingen on the right. Engineer Company A worked night and day opening the main highway for the 9<sup>th</sup> to pass through Bullingen. 3 to 4 feet of snow, mines, and wrecked equipment clogged the road.

The 9<sup>th</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry regiments jumped off on a drive through deep snow and bitter cold to retake the three towns of Wirtzfeld, Krinkelt, and Rocherath, where it had successfully blocked Rundstedt's December drive. By noon two tank dozers and a D-7 set off exploding mines and were disabled. The Engineer Battalion was working hard to get more equipment up to the front. By night a total of 7 tank dozers and 4 tractor dozers were knocked out by mines. 4 other dozers failed due to mechanical trouble. Every battalion engineer worked feverishly to get the mines removed, the roads cleared, and the infantry and armor through to the fight. The risks were taken with the dozers being destroyed because the roads had to be opened to meet offensive deadlines.

The Ninth Reg. pushed off at the same time to pass through the 1<sup>st</sup> Division making a limited attack and continue to the Wehlerscheid area which it had previously taken in early December. The rough terrain, thick forest and snow made fatiguing progress, but the division was in a vengeful mood and anxious to return to the border towns which were now reduced to shambles by Allied bombing and shelling.

The 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry took Wirtzfeld without resistance, but the town and the approaches were heavily mined. Lt. Col. Jack K. Norris, a Bn. Cmdr. stepped into a building to consult a map and he and his men captured six Germans hiding in the cellar.

After working all night and day a neighboring Eng. Bn, the 1340<sup>th</sup>, built a 50 ft. Bailey Bridge and the road to Krinkelt finally open by 0900. A fine mist had started that night and continued all day, causing the roads to begin disintegrating.

From there two battalions of the 38th pushing on into Krinkelt and Rocherath where enemy delaying action caused fierce house to house fighting before resistance was overcome. Led by 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Albert Shelton, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, one platoon spearheaded the attack into Krinkelt. They were the last to leave in December and the first now to enter the splintered town. 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. John S. Calhoun, Jacksonville, Fla. Assumed command of his company when the commander fell mortally wounded, and retook his old CP along with 15 German prisoners.

The 23 CT, supported by Pop's company with two tank dozers, a D-7 and R-4 pushed north out of Rocherath during the night of Jan 31. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Eng. Bn. CP was moved to Dom



Butgenbach with Lt. Col. Snetzer and his staff getting details organized for furthering the attack.

One Feb 1 the 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment and the 23rd Combat Team with Pop commanding Company B Engineers, started attacking abreast up towards Heartbreak Crossroads through the Monschau Forest. With snow in drifts 4 to 5 ft. deep the going was treacherous. While clearing the roads two tank dozers were blown up by mines, but the attack had to go on, nothing was to stop it.



HeartBreak Crossroads: Back after over six weeks in previously taking it. The forest is stunted from the many explosions during battle.

A young 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant showed up at B Company engineers. The Lt. was a recent West Point graduate. This was his first assignment and action. He had a tank dozer with two large metal arms in front with a large metal drum it was fitted to hold and rotate by a mechanism. The drum had lengths of heavy chain attached all over and was to rotate, hitting the ground, setting off mines and making a path through a mine field. He knew all about the machinery and how it was suppose to work. He eagerly told everyone about it, explaining it would be safer than having men walking with mine detectors walking and trying to find mines, especially under the deep snow.

Pop had his orders and those were to clear a large mine field in front of the 23<sup>rd</sup> CT and do it fast so the infantry could move through and attack.

Pop was like, "Okay lieutenant, that's fine. Let's get this thing out there and clear mines now."

Pop rode in the tank dozer with the Lieutenant as the young officer's crew started the drum rotating with its chains violently hitting the ground as the tank moved up to and into the mine field.

There was a violently loud BAM! A mine was set off with some chains being blown off the drum. Pop didn't see this being that useful if the chains blew off each time it set off a mine. But they were in the thick of the field and Pop ordered him to keep at it. Chains kept getting blown off as mines were hit with loud blasting explosions, especially to those in the tank. Soon most of the chains were blown off and the method was no longer effective. The

Lt. wanted to back up; and save his tank. Mortars were constantly falling about, some nearer, some a little further off.

Pop ordered him straight forward as the tank itself would make a good mine set off instrument. The infantry was waiting to charge through the path they cleared, other large units were depending on the infantry moving through this area in a certain time frame. So they barreled forward until an explosion blew the track off the tank with everyone inside violently shaken with the explosion underneath the tank. It was kaput.

Pop and his company engineers brought up their hand held mine detectors and continued on in front of the wrecked tank, taking casualties from the income enemy fire, until they were able to detect the mines, disarm them and cleared a path through the large field.

The forward Engineer Bn. HQ was moved to Krinkelt where the town had literally been torn apart. It lay in ruins with bodies lying about and Tiger tanks knocked out all through the town.

The next day the 9<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment jumped off from the Crossroads at 0700. The attack was supported by A Company with two tank dozers and 2 tractor dozers opening up the MSR right behind the 9<sup>th</sup>. The infantry on tanks advanced rapidly for 5000 yards and by evening had overrun Schonseiffen and Harperscheid, knocking out a tank, a self propelled gun, and capturing 250 prisoners.

The engineers found fewer mines but the heavy snow had to be literally plowed through. 48 days after withdrawing from Heartbreak Crossroads, the 9<sup>th</sup> was back. This time was different. The 9<sup>th</sup> outflanked Wehlerscheid, and the Germans, instead of their desperate defense in December, cowered in the pillboxes awaiting capture.

On 3 Feb the infantry jumped off again through the snow to take Ettelscheid an Bronsfeld, just under a mile from Schleiden. The engineers worked night and day with mine detectors and dozers to open up the roads, often under enemy fire ahead of the doughboys.

The next day the push continued with continuing drizzling rain and melting snow. The weather was miserable to work at war in. Many mines were found by the engineers, but one jeep was blown up by a mine. The Eng. Bn. is moved to Schonseiffen, Germany along with the 35<sup>th</sup> Reg. CP.

About this time Pop wanted to write Mom but was just too busy, so he ordered 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. Fontenot to write her one. Mom said she received a very nice, well written, informative six page letter from 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. Fontenot.

On Feb 5 the 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment attacked south to secure the town of Hellenthal. It was a tough battle of Germans firing on the Americans from every vantage point and the Americans fighting back with BARs, machine guns, rifles, bazookas, tanks, and tank destroyers. The infantry badly wanted bridges into town but the enemy kept the engineers off the bridging site by fire.

The 38<sup>th</sup>'s soldiers fought street battles with the Germans all through town and started pushing them back. One company of engineers commanded by a Capt. Kopplin put two bridges over the river into town, enabling the tanks, trucks, and TDs finally into the town, and the town is taken. It is another blasted and wrecked village, where all the civilians had left and the German soldiers were rounded up and sent to PW cages.

The enemy kept active in the Hellenthal area with patrols constantly probing Division lines. One German patrol's radio messages were intercepted by 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Charles Curley. He used Pfc. Solomon Fink of Elgin, North Dakota as an interpreter and succeeded in calling in mortar fire on the enemy trying to penetrate the Division's lines. The last message they



heard was, "Those bastard Americans are shelling the road, we can't get any nearer; there are casualties."

February 7 found the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division improving and holding its position. They were up against the strongest belt of the Siegfried Line. The 1<sup>st</sup> Division on the 2<sup>nd</sup>'s right is replaced by the 99<sup>th</sup> and 106<sup>th</sup> Divisions. The 76<sup>th</sup> on the 2<sup>nd</sup>'s left has reached the dams.

It is rain and mud everywhere. All the engineers were out draining and maintaining roads, blowing mines and building permanent bridges at secondary crossings.

In the next two days the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division improved and held its position. Lt. Col. Snetzer managed to furlough one officer and five men to England. About half of the Engineer Battalion officers and thirty men had gotten some passes to Paris. Pop, as a company commander as part of 23rd CT in full assault on the enemy, wasn't one of them.

Lt. Col. Snetzer and Capt. Fred Valentino drove into St. Vith. The town had been retaken by the U.S. Army. It was leveled, leveled only by St. Lo. One could look clear across town. Where once were buildings were now craters.

As the Americans advanced past St. Vith they found great amounts of German equipment, trucks and especially artillery abandoned and overrun.

The next Sunday Lt. Col. Snetzer looked over Urftalsperre Dam with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. barely holding the South end and the Germans on the far side having direct fire on any activity on the dam.

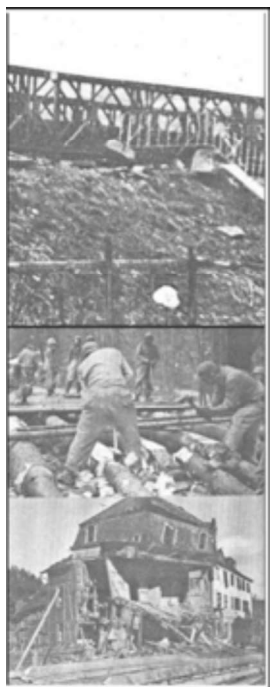
Near there Lt. Col. Snetzer toured a beautiful school for Hitler's youth overlooking the Urft Lake and dam. It was for training them in "Ordensburg Vogelsang", geopolitics for ruling the world. Sitting on a high hill it contained thousands of rooms with exquisite stone and wood construction.

## Chapter Sixty Five

By February 17 with the weather continuing warm and spring like, all snow is melting, but the hard surface roads are going to pieces with all the traffic. In the rear areas the heavy traffic actually caused some roads to close in places. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. continued holding its position overlooking Schleiden with the 69<sup>th</sup> on the right and 9<sup>th</sup> Div. on the left.

Pop and Company B were building a 70 ft. Bailey bridge over the Olef river in front of Hellenthal, but it could only be done at night due to enemy fire. The fight for the Hellenthal area had continued despite American attacks.

The Germans had blown the only bridge into the town put up previously. Building a long Bailey was a complicated job at best during the day. At night, moving the heavy bridge parts and assembling them by manpower at night with as little light as possible was tough. The roads into the small valley holding the town were under constant enemy observation and could bring down artillery and mortar fire, which occasionally hit around them while they scrambled to connect the bridge parts and push them out over the deep river bed. This larger bridge needed completion and tanks and tank destroyers run over it before the Hellenthal area and beyond could be secured. The bridge was completed. The American armor moved over in strength, and the area finally secured.



Top: Partial photo of seventy foot Bailey bridge built by Pop and B Company across the Olef Bach on approaching Hellenthal, under cover of darkness and accurate enemy fire that caused several casualties.

Middle: B Company engineers constructing timber bridges to replace blown stream crossing on the road into Hellenthal.

Bottom: blasted building in Hellenthal.

Two days later the Bn CP was moved to Einruhr to relieve the 15<sup>th</sup> Engineers of the 9<sup>th</sup> Division. The 26<sup>th</sup> Division relieved the 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. The roads were still taking all the Engineer's time and efforts.

By February 25 the 29<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Corps of the 9<sup>th</sup> Army and 7 Corps of First Army have crossed the Roer River in force and are pushing toward the German town of Cologne. The weather went from spring like to cold and cloudy.

On March 1 Task Force S formed and on March 3 moved into the bridgehead at Heimbach, attacking south through the 78<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. advancing 4500 yards through heavily mined areas and scattered enemy fire. Task Force "S" was composed of various units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division including Company C of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineers.

"A" Company of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Eng. Kept up slow, painful removing of heavy abates and mines on the road from Herhahn to Gemund. On the same day Pop left for a week in England. After coming in on Omaha Beach on the morning of June 7 the previous year, he was finally out of a combat zone for a few days.

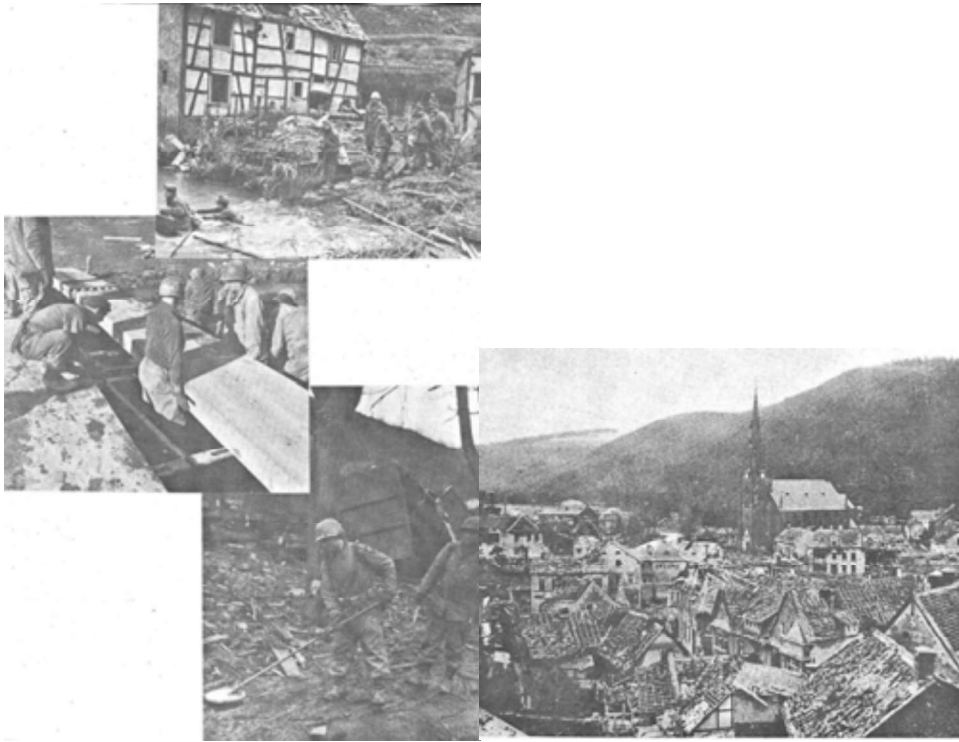
Combat Team S for its commander, Col. Stokes, continues the pressure against Gemund from the rear. "A" Co. continued work all night opening atatis into Gemund with mines everywhere. They reached the bridge into Gemund at 0300 and began clearing the approaches. Lts. McDougalby and Delaney were seriously wounded and two enlisted men were killed by mines.

A 110 ft. Bailey and 90 ft. Bailey are built by the 254<sup>th</sup> Engineers into Gemund. "B" Company moves to the other side of the river in support of CT 23 and two bull dozer tractors are blown up by enemy mines.

At 0300 on March 6 after a fourth tank crossed the big Bailey, a mine under the abutment blew the bridge up. All the 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. time schedules were wrecked and a treadway bridge into Gemund was opened by 1200.

The Bn. CP is moved to Berg as the Division CP is moved to Vlatten, with the axis of advance turning sharply to the south east with supply snarled, but the tough shell in Gemund and along the river is broken. The weather was all snow and rain, with an enemy withdrawal clearly indicated.

Gemund was a bastion in the final belt of the Siegfried Line. After five long months, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division was through the West Wall and entered a new phase of the war.



Left photo bottom: the tedious, dangerous task of clearing mines from long blocked, debris filled road. Heavy casualties occurred. Pop with Company B threw two footbridges across the Rur River just upstream of Dam Number 5 near Gemund. Top Left photo and right photo: damaged town of Gemund after the town was taken by 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. and 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Bn. Forces. With the fall of Gemund, the last belt of the Siegfried Line was smashed and the Division surged southeast to swing up against the Rhine, just south of Remagen.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was really rolling now, the infantry riding on tanks and trucks, advancing rapidly to the southeast, taking many towns and villages including Mechernich, with no resistance. Late in the day some delaying forces were quickly overcome. By day's end there was no resistance along the entire Division front. At the Division's cage the 43 enemy POWs were from 35 different units.

On March 7 American tanks rolled through Munstereiffel by noon. The First Army is fanning out everywhere as Cologne fell to 104<sup>th</sup> Division and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored. The Ninth Army is linking up with the British.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion is moved to Holzheim and the Division CP to Mechernecht. There was rumor the 9<sup>th</sup> Armored Division had seized a rail bridge over the Rhine at Remagen, and it was intact!

General William Hoge, leader of Combat Command B of the 9<sup>th</sup> Armored Division had stood on a cliff overlooking the Rhine, and saw an intact bridge. He couldn't believe it.

Hitler had issued orders that every bridge across the Rhine was to be blown ahead of any American, French, or British spearhead. The Rhine had served for hundreds of years as a natural barrier to invasion from the west. But faulty connections to the German charges on the bridge only allow a partial explosion, leaving the bridge damaged, but just passable.

A call was put to Lt. John Grimball of Columbia, South Carolina, leader of a platoon of Pershing tanks, "Grimball, get the hell to the bridge!" Barked General Hoge.

Along Grimbald's route an old man is working in his garden. One of the tankers, thinking he might be a Volkstrum (People's Army), takes three pot shots at him. The old man sprawled in the dirt, unharmed. The Americans raced up to and over the bridge, seizing it. The seventy year old man in the garden, Konrad Adenauer, four years later, would serve as the Chancellor of the West German Republic and become a staunch ally of the United States in NATO.

The four German engineers who were responsible for blowing up the bridge over the Rhine over which American tanks were now racing were all ordered by Hitler to be shot.

Lt. Col. Snetzer's diary as they moved into the very edge of western Germany before the Rhine: "We move in as conquerors. People are bewildered and scared. We pick out the best houses for our C.P. and billets, kick people out, spend night, and move on next day. Continues to rain unceasingly. Visibility zero, weather cold, and damp. Mud, mud, but we are over roads before they break down too much."

March 8 finds the V Corps and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division moving to the vicinity of Effelsberg with the infantry sizing bridges intact on the Ahr River, expecting to wheel east to the Rhine. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion removed hastily placed roadblocks and mines, and constructed four steel treadway bridges along the route of advance.

The 38<sup>th</sup> Combat Team, with Pop commanding B Company Engineers, takes over the left flank of 78<sup>th</sup> Division sector, permitting them to throw more across the Remagen bridgehead. The 9<sup>th</sup> Armored and 78<sup>th</sup> Division are all now across Rhine at Remagen. The Germans had continually tried to bomb the bridge but with massed American guns all around the fire was fierce, shooting down every German plane that attacked.

As American forces moved into Germany the country shows railroad yards destroyed by Allied bombing but the rest of the country seen so far is untouched. A great ammunition dump is found in the woods. Rain, unceasing rain continues. The various Division units continue on toward Rhine. The Bn CP is moved to outskirts of Ahrweiler and the Div. CP to Bruck.

March 10 the Engineer Battalion pulls up to the Rhine River at the Ludendorf Bridge at the German town of Remagen as the entire Division closed on its west bank, though it is often referred to as the Remagen Bridge. The Doughboys of the 9<sup>th</sup> Inf. Division are streaming across on foot as unending columns of vehicles and tanks roll steadily along.

A steel treadway bridge is  $\frac{3}{4}$  across the river at noon, 500 yards downstream from the Remagen Bridge, with two 25 ton pontoon bridges across. The bridge received continual enemy artillery fire the day before. It is still coming in today on March 11, but not as heavy.

Enemy war materials were seized in Fronau and Buir and 22 rail car loads in a tunnel west of Schuld. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division continues pulling up its long tail of vehicles and men and is ordered to set up a defensive position on the west bank of the Rhine to guard against any waterborne attack on the bridge. The Engineer CP is moved to Heimersheim and the Div. CP to Bad Neuenahr.

The Engineer CP is in a big winery with thousands of gallons of wine. The entire engineer headquarters company had supper with wine glasses, white table cloths. The town civilians are completely dazed by the Americans sudden takeover.

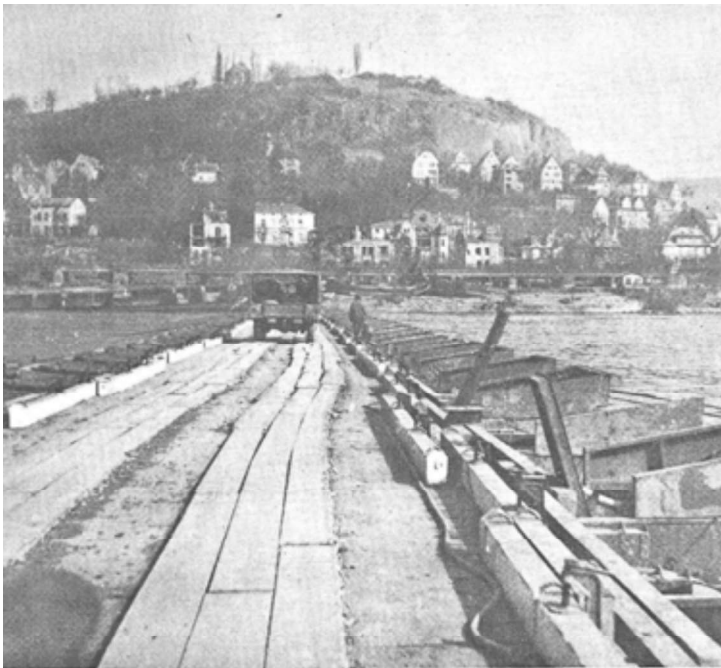
The next day the units rested but also captured 639 prisoners. Other units pour across the Remagen Bridge while the 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. awaits our turn. Traffic rolls endlessly over all bridges

over the Rhine. Enemy artillery continues firing all the time with some shells falling in the Eng Bn. town but not too near.

March 12 the 2<sup>nd</sup> is still holding its position 12 kilometers south of Remagen bridgehead. Traffic rolls endlessly over the bridges despite continuing numerous air raids. The big job for the engineers is controlling troops and civilians in the densely populated wine growing region. Many freed Poles, Russian, and French slave laborers are roaming aimlessly around the country side.

Lt. Col. Snetzer and Capt. Valentino visit Cologne on March 13, finding the city utterly devastated, far exceeding anything found in England. The city of 750,000 is now almost deserted.

The Krauts continue throwing everything they can at the Remagen bridgehead area as it is expanding with more American troops and vehicles crossing continually. The 99<sup>th</sup> Division is across and fighting off determined German attacks by the 11<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Panzer Divisions on the bridgehead area.



The American planes patrol all day over the Remagen area but the Germans are given to raid with their jet planes with swift sneak attacks. These are learned later to be the ME262 German jets, responsible for hundreds of American plane losses, especially B-17 bombers.

Steel Treadway bridge across the Rhine where most of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. and 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion crossed.

The Ludendorf Bridge at Remagen collapsed on March 17. It fell while a whole company of engineers were working on it. 27 men were killed when it fell. They were repairing it as men and arms continued streaming across.

On the night of March 19 the Second Battalion of the 9<sup>th</sup> Reg. made a night landing attack on the Rhine Island opposite Hammerstein, eliminating a small pocket of resistance that continued holding out.

On the opening day of the Central Europe Campaign by the Allies, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Combat Battalion crossed the pontoon bridge over the Rhine River at Linz. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division immediately began a push to the South and East, on the left and abreast of the 9<sup>th</sup> Armored Division, to crack the ring of enemy resistance and permit an expansion of the Remagen

bridgehead. The mission of the Engineers was the clearing of mines, abates, and other blocks from routes of advance. Hundreds of non-metallic Topf, as well as the more common anti-tank mines, were encountered during this operation.

March 21 the Division crossed the Rhine to re-enter an area where just 26 years before, in December 1919, the Second had spanned the river in the same section and spent eight months as part of the Army of Occupation. The Indianhead patch was no stranger. Surprised civilians ran into the streets, pointing at the patches and jabbering away that they remembered them from years back. The Second Quartermaster Company set up its CP in a building in Heimbach and discovered the Division's 15<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery had its CP in the same building in 1919. Pictures turned up of the 15<sup>th</sup>'s band with the Indianhead patch and the Heimbach burgomaster brought forth an old 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. jacket from World War.

The Division's Col. Hirschfelder was with the Second when they were here back in World War I. He was the only officer who had been in the German occupation back then that was still with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division.

The 38<sup>th</sup> Regiment captured the towns of Segendorf and Rodenbach where 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. Marines from the last war had been billeted. At Gonnersdorf, Herman Krohn of Milwaukee of the Division's 15<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery back then, had returned to Germany in 1920, marrying a German woman and had two sons. Now at 59 he'd had enough of Germany and wanted to take his family back to the states, "as soon as possible."

But the Division was not merely occupying the area. It had the job of broadening the bridgehead and cutting a hole for the armor to start its eastward push. In the month ahead, the Division was to travel close to 400 miles to the very heart of Germany, take 19,000 prisoners and liberate slave workers and prisoners by the thousands. All phases of Germany – murder institutions, concentrations camps, Gestapo and SS headquarters and the tremendous war plants that had kept the Nazi war machine operating were to be uncovered.



## Chapter Sixty Six

The Division relieved the 394<sup>th</sup> Regiment on getting to the Rhine's east bank and set up the Division CP in Honningen. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division then attacked southward for five days, taking some 20 towns and encountering hastily assembled enemy units which opposed the advance with machine gun, rifle, and moderate artillery fire. After the occupation of Baumbach, the 9<sup>th</sup> Armored Div., with the 2<sup>nd</sup>'s 38<sup>th</sup> Regiment attached passed through with the Second following it until the end of March in a wide encircling movement, creating the Ruhr pocket.

Elements of the Division engaged in mopping up by passed enemy groups, combing the woods and isolated villages. Prisoners rounded up during this time averaged 200 per day, most were stragglers.

At Hadamar, near Limberg, where the Division CP located on March 29, Military Intelligence and MPs discovered one of the Nazi murder camps. The Germans themselves estimated since 1941 at least 20,000 political prisoners, Jews, and slave laborers had been put to death. The prisoners were worked till too weak to work, then starved to the point of death, and then killed by hypodermic injection. Before the war with the Nazi attack on Poland, Hadamar had been the center of the beginnings of the death camps in 1939 with some 200,000 murdered there initially. Located at a psychiatric hospital in Hadamar near Limburg as covered on page 75.



Gas chamber in Hadamar hospital

the programme lasted until the German surrender in 1945. Nearly 15,000 German citizens were transported to the hospital and died there, most killed in a gas chamber. In addition, hundreds of forced labourers from Poland and other countries occupied by the Nazis were killed there.

This camp was one of some 40,000 forced labor, concentration, and extermination camps the Nazis set up and ran in the lands they occupied. Most were a combination of all three aspects except for certain camps that were set up for the industrial scale mass murder of people, namely Jews, such as Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Majdanek, Sobibor and others.

Captain Brinkley Hamilton, attached to the Division's military government team, led the investigation and said in ten years with the London police force he had never seen anything equal to the methodical cruelty of this camp at Hadamar. Killing of the 10,000<sup>th</sup> person,

Division officers were told, was celebrated at a party where guests drank from one of the victim's skull's.

Pop remembered the German guards throwing up their hands at the sight of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division soldiers' rifles pointing at them. Pop's single, terse description of the camp; "It was bad." There were starved bodies lying about, skeletons, and a few pitiful prisoners barely living. During these days Division soldiers started encountering thousands of liberated slave laborers and prisoners. They would wave and smile as they pushed their belongings on carts.

Many had been dragged into Germany five years before. What they each had gone through one could only guess.

German soldiers were being collected in droves. American prisoners were being liberated. The 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment found 25 emaciated U.S. soldiers who had escaped their German captors in and met the Division in Braunfels. One related how they were starved and beaten. At least three of their fellows had suffocated when they were all packed like matches in a rail car for four days.

The First Army, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was part of, linked up with the Ninth Army near Penderborn on April 1. Everything was closing up and trying to hold the trap on 21 German Divisions encircled. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion CP is set up in one of Hitler's unwed mothers home, populating the Third Reich with pure Aryan babies. They were run out and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Eng. Bn. took over.

The Division is sitting tight in the ring around the Germans. The Bn. Hq. picked up 20 Germans PWs in the Hq. area. The area German positions had been overrun so fast many Krauts were left behind American lines. They were liable to try and break out anywhere.

The 38<sup>th</sup> Regiment liberated 47 American prisoners near Limberg. One T/Sgt. Sim Cartwright of Nashville from the 78<sup>th</sup> Division in the group was taken prisoner during the American breakthrough. He greeted First Sergeant William Woolen from San Antonio, from the 2<sup>nd</sup>. They served together in the Pacific ten years before.

The 38<sup>th</sup>'s Anti-Tank company in Bonenburg got into a vicious seven hour battle with 15 German tanks and 800 SS fanatical troops. The SS troops made a feint and then barreled into the town with all guns blazing. At one time during the battle the American troops would be on the second floor while German troops battled from the first floor. Finally the Americans called in

Artillery on their own positions. With the help of U.S. tanks and armored infantry the Anti-Tank company, holding firm, finally controlled the enemy. The furious action left four American dead, 20 wounded and three missing in action.

On April 1 the jaws of the Ruhr snapped shut on some 340,000 encircled Germans. The reduction of the pocket was left to other units and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. struck out with the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Div., sometimes mopping up, sometimes swinging out in front to crush tough obstacles.

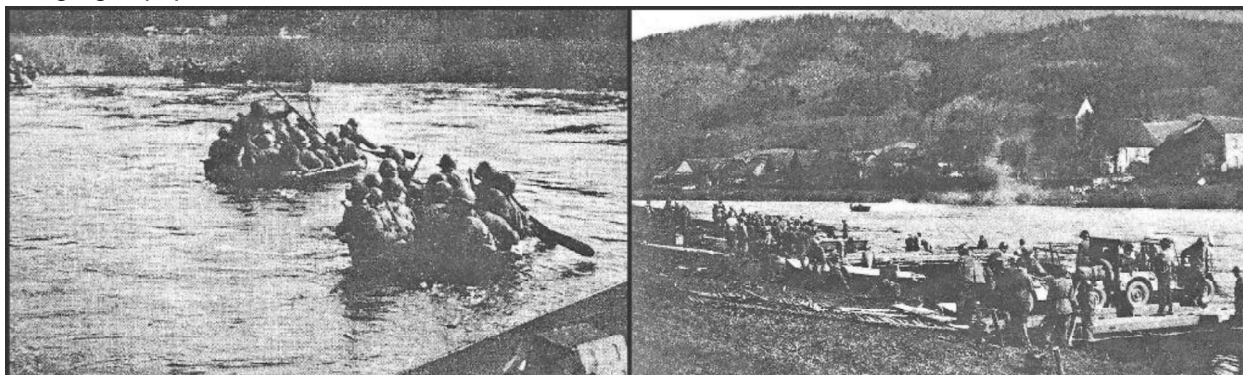
From Lt. Col. Snetzer's diary, "A summary of the last months activities for Division shows advance of 200 miles, 5,283 PWs, 64 KIA, 440 WIA, 24 MIA, and 13 C.P.s in previous 9 months." Since leaving the Rhine, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had made six moves and established six different CPs.

Apparent stubborn defense at Hofgeismar prompted a heavy artillery barrage being laid down by 2<sup>nd</sup> Division artillery. The town was then encircled by tanks who then pushed through spraying machine gun fire. They found wide eyed youths 15-18 years old, most

whom had received some SS training. Most fought courageously. Some had been taken from their homes only days before. The town was taken.

April 5 the Division was moving east preparatory to launching an attack up to the Weser river in rainy and wet weather. The next day the Division moved up to the river and the 23<sup>rd</sup> started moving across the 300 ft. wide river by assault boats manned by Company B, commanded by Pop.

He directed "B" Company men all that night; ordering the platoon leaders and sergeants to organize in boat groups to move the infantry soldiers, their weapons, and some vehicles by units as they assembled on the bank of the Weser River, until all three battalions of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment were across. A steel treadway across the river was started at dusk by the 1340<sup>th</sup> Engineers. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Eng. Bn. had a frantic day of moving equipment, traffic, and bridging equipment.



In the twilight of April 7 and on through the night Pop and B Company ferried three Battalions of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment, both men and some vehicles, in an assault crossing to secure a bridgehead on the East bank.

Bn. and Div. CPs were moved to Grebenstein. Crossing was made into town of Hamelin, made famous by the Pied Piper poem.

April 7 found C Company working all night on a footbridge. It was washed away three times by the swift river and had to be given up.

Four ferries were built and operational by day ferrying a great amount of light equipment across the Wesser. A bridge was finished by 1330 with solid columns of tanks and TDs starting and continuing to pour across the rest of the day and night.

Bridging the Weser at Veckerhagen, the Second swept to one of its richest prizes, the old university center of Gottingen. It was taken by the 23<sup>rd</sup> Regiment with only a few shots fired. It yielded 23 hospitals, 2,500 German patients, four Nazi generals, and an airfield that was one of the best captured in Germany to date. Fifty German planes, valuable instruments, repair shops and two American aircraft were taken there.

On April 10 the 9<sup>th</sup> Armored Division rolled across the Weser bridges and through the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division to spearhead the V Corps drive toward the Elbe River.

At a Duderstadt prison camp, 700 Allied soldiers came into U.S. hands following months of severe marches, beatings, and miserable diets. Fifty of the men were Americans.

A mix bag of German military still fought, causing deaths and wounded among the soldiers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. Enemy tanks made their presence and the once vaunted Luftwaffe even occasionally showed up to strafe. The enemy defense was scattered with sharp fighting spells, but local reserves, Volkssturm and various groups came through POW channels, pouring in as much as 1,000 at a time, with every truck available used to rush

them to the rear. The disintegration of the German war machine was at hand. Hopes were that maybe joining with the Russians coming in from the East would result in V-E, Victory in Europe. So many doughboys were sending souvenirs home such as German pistols it began to strain the Divisions mail facilities.

Several tons of documents, thought to be the entire SS Surgeon General file, with many books bearing Himmler's signature, were found in Bad Frankenhausen.

The Second Quartermaster Company had to haul tremendous amounts of gasoline to keep the hundreds of vehicles in the Division going, plus transport thousands of prisoners to the rear; the trucks had to haul the QM supplies and equipment, plus carry the infantry troops and the Division CP. Supply dumps were moved in just behind the spearheading armor so the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division would have its stores ready when they came through mopping up. Some drivers covered 400 miles in a day. As much as 40,000 gallons were being brought forward in a day with tremendous numbers of prisoners going to the rear.

On April 9 the Bn. C.P. moved 6 miles to K1 Lengden, then the Ninth Armored Division pushed through, advancing 32 Km east as 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. and 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. and awaits orders in their farm house Hq. preparing to follow them. There is bright Spring weather. The Division's leading elements are driving eastward as apple blossoming trees line excellent winding roads. Pop and his company moved down the roads in columns of continuous vehicles.

On April 13 Pop and the rest of the troops learn of the death of President Roosevelt. Lt. Col. Snetzer's diary, "...felt as if I had personally suffered a great loss. The day was one of sadness and melancholy. It is a great tragedy for the U.S. and world."

The Division CP went to Bad Neuenhausen and the Bn CP to Schokenhausen. On April 13 the Division rolled another 30 Km, but in the Leuna-Merseburg area wearers of the Indian Head patch ran into the heaviest concentrations of ack-ack guns in Europe, and the hardest fighting they had encountered since crossing the Rhine. The ack-ack guns, ranging in caliber from 20 mm to 128 mm, and numbering over a thousand, protected the vast Leuna Synthetic Oil Plant at Merseberg, greatest in all of Germany. Now they were turned down to blast the approaching Americans on the ground.

2n Bn. Engineers were tasked with destroying over a hundred of the flak guns. On the night of 14 April, Pop and Company B made an assault crossing of the Saale River and Canal at Merseberg, transporting elements of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry who secured the bridgehead.

Pop in command of "B" Engineer Company, put a 48 ft. Treadway Bridge across a damaged span of the 200 ft. wide river, completing the job, in spite of being driven from the site three times by enemy artillery fire, in time for essential transportation to cross immediately behind the assaulting infantry. The Saal Canal was another 150 ft. wide span that continued holding up the advance. After dark the 23<sup>rd</sup> crossed two battalions by assault boats manned by engineers and Pop's "B" Company repaired a bridge across the canal to get the 23<sup>rd</sup> vehicles and tanks across.

For the full 14 mile stretch from around Merseberg on into Leipzig, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division soldiers received furious blasts from some 1,000 guns that before protected this crucial Nazi industrial area from Allied aerial attacks. Now they slashed advancing troops with tremendous barrages. Veterans said it was the heaviest artillery thrown at them since they came ashore in France eleven months before. 88mm to 128 mm flak guns plus many smaller caliber pieces, particularly multiple 20 mm guns. As many as 40 guns were emplaced in one location, in pits of brick with dirt piled around to thicknesses of 30 feet.

At the approach of 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. the Germans used these strong points to send direct fire at U.S. armor moving across the flat terrain and air bursts at our infantry. When Division soldiers got close some of the Germans fought with fanatical zeal, having to be blasted out with grenades.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Regiment battered their way to the river north of Merseberg. The Division CP moved to Barnstadt and Bn CP to Karsdorf.

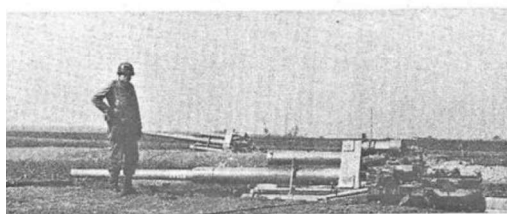
The war had returned with shocking rudeness to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Div and its soldiers. The heavy emplaced flak batteries fired point blank into the Divisions troops and tanks, leaving burned out tanks and dead soldiers in a now slow, inching advance.

After fighting all night the 23<sup>rd</sup> Reg. reached the river North of Merseberg and fought all day to reach the heart of the city. This was building to building against an enemy still bent on killing Americans. Shoot and maneuver, tanks blasting enemy positions, infantry working in behind the tanks. Lobbing grenades. Getting shot. Some wounded, some killed. No rest.

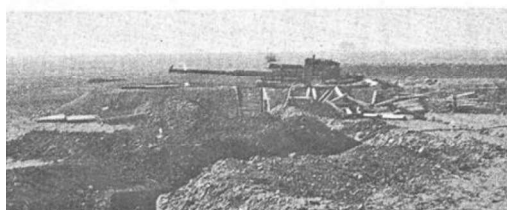


The war and its horror hadn't ended. The 9<sup>th</sup> Reg. met the same resistance and the 38<sup>th</sup> Regiment moved in a loop around to take the area from the rear with the CP moving to Scharfstdt.

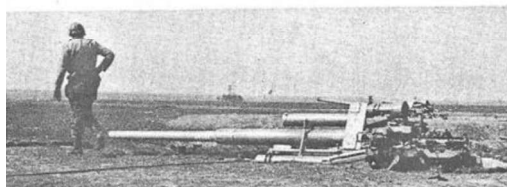
The 23<sup>rd</sup> Regiment, followed closely by the 38<sup>th</sup>, was the first American unit to enter the city. Anti-tank, panzerfaust and intense small arms fire was thrown at U.S. tanks and infantry as they neared the canal, but they managed to push across on April 18 and secure three bridges found intact.



In its first attempt to cross the Zeppelin Bridge the lead platoon of the 23<sup>rd</sup> met a barrage of machine gun and rifle, sustaining numerous casualties and forced to back off the span. S/Sgt Ernest Barber of Tionesta, Pennsylvania, serving as the lead scout, continued across the span alone, killed two Germans in hand to hand combat. Despite heavy U.S. artillery and mortar fire falling on this side of the canal, he began a one man rampage, capturing five enemy, assaulting and killing the crews of two machine gun positions. He returned to the bridge and gave valuable information to his company coming across.



Left: German flak gun positions guarding the Leuna Synthetic Oil Plant at Merseberg used against the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion engineers and 2<sup>nd</sup> Division infantry soldiers, captured after the battle for Merseberg and the approach to Leipzig.



Merseburg, near Germany's largest rubber plant and Leuna, the chief synthetic gasoline producer for the Reich, were both taken in the days long fight. The Leuna plant was a mess of iron and steel when the 9<sup>th</sup> pushed into the huge complex. A year before it had been

making 10,843,000 gallons of gasoline per month, but repeated air missions reduced that to 1,446,000 and it folded in March. The rubber plant continued until three days before and had 500 tons of rubber on hand.



Pictures of the Leuna Synthetic Oil Plant at Merseberg, largest in all of Germany, captured by 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division.

A subsidiary of I.G. Farben, the gasoline plant produced the vile smelling fuel from coal and coke, employing 28,000 people, about 10,000 of which were slave laborers.

Merseburg was defended by 2,000 Volkssturm members with Luftwaffe and labor troops using small arms, machine guns, ack-ack and panzerfaust fire effectively. One battalion of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Regiment was cut off inside the city when heavy concentrations of enemy fire knocked out tanks and jeeps coming in behind for support. With murderous ack-ack fire falling on the battalion, U.S. aid men and a German nurse and driver made mad dashes to a Nazi hospital on the opposite side of town to carry out enemy wounded.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> mopping up was completed on the U.S. side of the Saale River. The men had been tired days before, were more dog tired, but the job continued amid incoming fire, continuing no matter what. Those who escaped getting wounded or killed by enemy fire seemed at times just the luck of the draw.

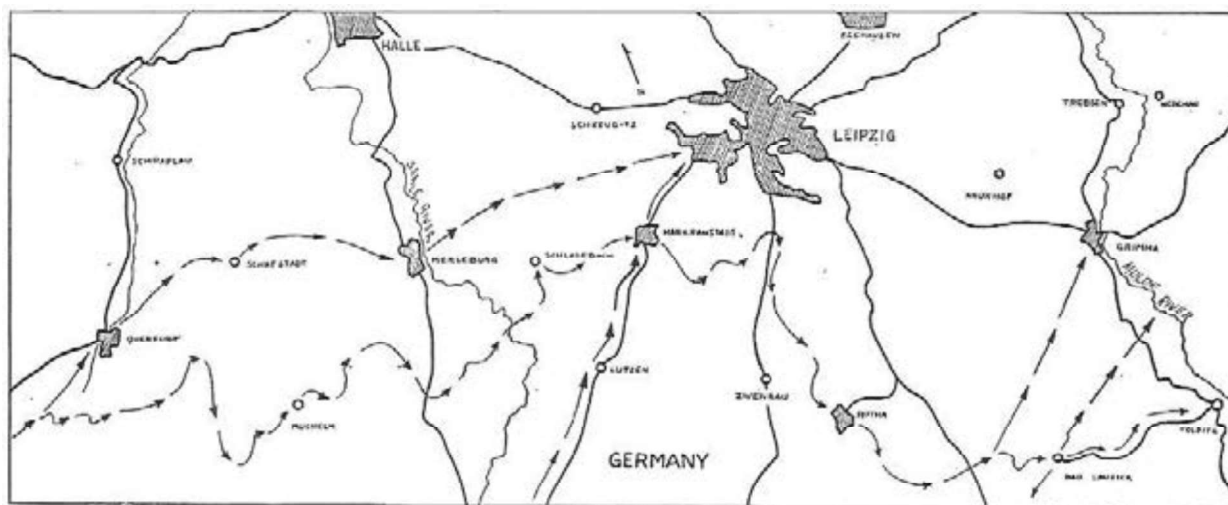
During the day more heavy flak batteries were knocked out by force until more than 200 triple A guns of 88, 105, and 128 mm were taken. They were deadly to capture. 1781 POWs were taken by the Division alone on this day, mostly Volkssturm members. An airfield and a large number of enemy planes were also taken.

The Bn. CP was moved in the afternoon to beautiful Luftwaffe barracks on the outskirts of Merseburg. The 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry completed crossing of the Saale Canal on the bridge Pop's B Company built, but heavy fire continues falling on the infantry positions as every inch is stubbornly resisted. Several shells fall in the Engineer Battalion CP area but cause no

casualties.

Lt. Col. Snetzer's diary; "These barracks are most beautiful and elaborate. Much better than Fort Sam. Every man a bed and elegant quarters, beautiful landscaping."

"Clearing of Ruhr pocket now more than 200 miles behind us continues with more than 317,000 PWs taken there."



Route of 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division through and into Leipzig.



Left: Dodging snipers in the railway station at Leipzig. Right: American machine gunner at a street corner in Leipzig. Some of the ornate buildings and cathedrals of the city were damaged in the fighting.



In Leipzig Engineers removed roadblocks of logs and rock-filled cars, debris, and trolley wires from the streets.



After crossing the Saale River, the Division and 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Bn. fought to the outskirts of Leipzig and then penetrated into the city itself. Pop's Company B made still another river crossing of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment, this time across the Weisse Elster, so that the Infantry could secure its seizure of West Leipzig.

In the heavy fighting for Leipzig, Pop received news about the terrible cost of war hitting close to home. Dad hadn't known about what had recently happened to a boy from back home, Charles Kannenberg, who in mid January was sent to the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division from the Replacement Depot. He was one of many who were hastily put into the ranks to replace those killed or wounded in the Bulge fighting.

He was the only child of J.H. and Matilda Kannenberg. Mr. Kannenberg was the Superintendent of Schools for the Huntington School District. Charles was the valedictorian of his graduating class. He attended Stephen F. Austin State Teachers College in Nacogdoches, Texas up the road from Huntington, and finished right at the top of his college class, majoring in chemistry. He was drafted and sent overseas with just a few weeks training, and put right into the line with the 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment. He had been severely wounded three weeks before in the fighting and taken to a U.S. run hospital, but his wounds were too severe and he passed away. Dad said he was one of the finest young men a person would ever meet. Dad heard it just about killed Charles' Mother. When Pop found out he lamented so that if he had just known, he could have possibly gotten the boy into the engineer battalion and watched over him. But he never knew.

The lines of General Patton, when his aide, a young captain, was killed in North Africa, come to mind, "I don't see why such fine young men have to die. There are so many battles left to fight."

Moving into Leipzig, the Second Division was given orders to hold their positions and allow the 69<sup>th</sup> Division to come north and affect a meeting. By dark of April 18 the city was almost cleared and fell the next day.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion's CP was moved into a great aluminum factory on the edge of Leipzig, an advance of 30 km. The enormous factory employed 4,000 slave laborers.

From Lt. Col. Snetzer's diary from April 19, "Drove and walked around city as it was being taken. Great crowds of civilians lined streets watching our troops move thru like a regular parade. Machine gun fired from upper story windows and tanks and men edged thru town with quite a battle for crossing of canal."

"After looking for another C.P. in heart of city, 4 of us found public swimming pool and went for swim in fine tile pool in nice new building. Meanwhile, war went on outside. Then we inspected a most elaborate hunting lodge in park in city for possible C.P. Was most beautiful place, like Hollywood setting. We made arrangements that we were coming back for hot baths in couple of hours in this movie actress bathroom and did. It felt so good to clean up again after dust and dirt of continual move."

"Today was reminiscent of surrender of Brest, but city here is practically undamaged and about 10 times bigger (population 700,000 and 5<sup>th</sup> largest city of Germany.)"

Pop and a sergeant went to inspect a large hall they encountered in the city center area before Leipzig fell. He and the sergeant went through the entrance. The fighting had died down in that particular area. They walked in to see seats rising all around and a large open floor filled with chairs. They had walked well into the hall, adjusting to the dim light before

they were aware the seats were all full of German soldiers with fully loaded arms. Pop and the sergeant were now in the middle of the hall. The Germans looked at them, they looked at the Germans. Pop only had his sidearm and the sergeant had his rifle. There were hundreds of armed enemy. A German officer approached them, as Pop and the sergeant tensed, and told them in English they had decided to surrender. Pop thought that a good thing. The whole group was turned over to the American MPs.

## Chapter Sixty Seven

Since crossing the Rhine, the Second Infantry Division has traveled 365 miles in little less than a month in continual fighting. During 13-19 April the Division destroyed 505 AAA guns of 88, 105, and 128 mm, and took 9,111 Prisoners of War.

Leipzig enabled 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Robert W. O'Banion, Ordnance Supply Officer of the 702 Ordnance Company and other ordnance officers to buy and requisition from civilian factories in Belgium and Germany, auto paint and parts to repair vehicles and equipment that due to the wear and tear of war had begun to impair the efficiency of the Divisions operations.

The Engineer Bn. stayed in their factory working on vehicles and equipment. Everyone was busy sending home boxes of souvenirs and loot.

The entire city of Leipzig showed white flags from every window. Entire blocks of buildings had been bombed out but the streets were meticulously being cleared up. Not everyone had accepted the American takeover however, after a night of drinking the local burgeoisie and half the leadership of the Leipzig city hall committed suicide. Many Germans did commit suicide, even whole families. This was especially true of those being taken over by the Soviets who raped at will and were brutal to captives. The Soviets didn't forget the killing of their own civilians and the wasting of their towns and villages. Also, of the five million Soviet troops captured by the Germans, most in the first year of Operation Barbarossa when Germany invaded the Soviet Union, only half lived to return home as mentioned earlier, with many dying in concentration camps. One historical figure puts them at over three million Soviet troops died in German captivity.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Bn. moved southeast another 30 km to Lauterbach as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division moved swiftly to take up a defensive position along the Mulde River and await a possible link up with the Russians. Many war correspondents roamed the Division area for days after its artillery observation planes spotted Red columns moving up from the East. The linkup was further north at Torgau, and out of the Division's sector.

The Engineer Bn. CP is in a very lovely farm house on a great estate almost as one of the U.S. southern estates. Lt. Col. Snetzer, "We are now running the farms with Polski laborers and having big time."

Hundreds of Germans caught between the two Allied forces sought to cross the Mulde, choosing the U.S. over the Soviets, but only German soldiers were allowed to come over to the PW cages. Others must stay where they were.

Germans fleeing from the Soviet crowd on the east bank of the Mulde River, seeking to enter the American Lines. American MPs helping them up onto the American side. The only Germans officially admitted were soldiers who became POWs, but many displaced and liberated persons were also received here.

Lt. Col Snetzer's diary:  
"25 April, Wednesday



"Still sitting comfortably on line of Mulde River awaiting complete linkup with Russians. Have G-2 (intelligence) report that patrols from 69<sup>th</sup> Division, on our left, pushed out about 30 miles today and actually contacted Russians at Torgau."

"Russians completed encircling Berlin today and our Third and Seventh armies are pushing rapidly on to the South. British are having a tough sticky fight for Bremen and Hamburg. 30 April, Monday D plus 327

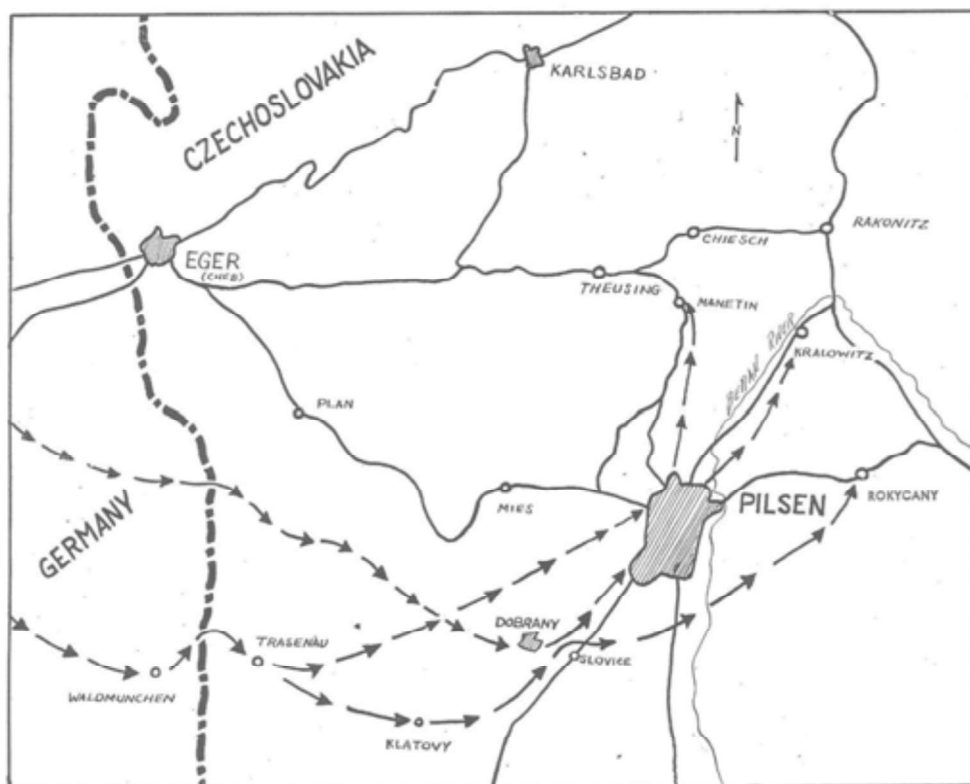
VISITED RUSSIANS."

"Today Freddy (Capt. Valentino) and I drove up to 269<sup>th</sup> Engineers with Division Engineer of 69<sup>th</sup> Division drove thru Elenburg to Torgau to see the Russians. We saw many Russian soldiers, all with automatic weapons, including extremely good looking girl soldiers wearing silk stockings who were MPs on the Russian pontoon bridge built across the river Elbe yesterday. General Hodges came up today and crossed bridge to meet Russian Army Commander. Newspaper reporters and photographers everywhere including Ernest Hemingway and Edward Ward of BBC who was making his broadcasts there on the river bank and who interpreted Russian signs throughout for us."

"Not a single solitary German was to be seen in Torgau. They had all fled in terror before approach of the Russians. Town was thoroughly looted, smashed up and invaded in true Russian style."

For 15 miles to Torgau, 69<sup>th</sup> Division men stood every 100 yards for the passage of General Hodges' Party. Lt. Col. Snetzer wrote that it was as if traveling in a parade with too much saluting. U.S. P-38s fighters flew continual air cover for the American group.

One American soldier named Doug, in a German POW camp in Eastern Europe, whom I knew while working at a company in Houston, Texas, told of the German guards leaving before the Soviets got to the camp. He said soon you could see the Soviet soldiers, many with varied clothes, looking like a Mongol hoard coming over the hills approaching the camp. The camp was liberated and they were surprised to find the officer in charge of the Soviet group was a woman.



The Last Campaign found the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division moving south from the Mulde River east of Leipzig, as V Corps advanced to clear the pocket of German troops now backed up into Czechoslovakia.

The long serpentine line of motorized troops of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division moved out, to thrust 200 miles south into the western part of the redoubt of German-held Czechoslovakia, one of the last corners left in German hands after the piecemeal falling apart of the Nazi war machine in Central Europe.

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As Wendy Holden continued in her book, "Born Survivors", Priska, Rachel, and Anka, all pregnant, were locked in the top floor of the aircraft metal fabrication factory where they worked in Freiberg, Germany while a series of Allied air raids on Dresden, the capital of Saxony, began around 10 p.m. 13 February, 1945 by some seven hundred British heavy Lancaster bombers. None of the three knew of the existence of the other pregnant women. The women slave laborers prayed bombs would drop on them so that the factory wouldn't work on the Nazi war production. But they didn't.

In days lines of refugees from Dresden filed through Freiberg. Power and supplies stopped most production in the factory. The already little food was further reduced. Through the melting snow the women would grab fistfuls of grass on the way to the factory in the morning to eat.

Priska, nine months pregnant, weighing only seventy pounds, was late to the morning Appell. When asked why by one of the guards she said, "My being late is hardly going to destroy the Reich." The guard beat her with his fist until she fell and curled up into a ball to protect her and her baby until he finally stopped.

They were instructed to dismantle the aircraft machinery to take to another factory, not knowing if they were to be killed on the spot, or sent to one of the death camps, such as Auschwitz, Treblinka, Belzec, and Sobibor, unaware these camps had been overrun by the Soviet army.

One Czech woman, upon finding Priska pregnant, in an effort to divert them from searching everyone as she had kept hidden her family's diamond jewels, revealed to the

guards of Priska's condition. The guards crowded around Priska asking if this was true. "Yes" Priska admitted in a whisper, expecting to be immediately be shot. After conferring together they shocked her by asking what she needed. The women prisoner's muscles were losing whatever muscle they had left. Many of them had swollen feet and could barely walk. Priska's were swollen, caked with mud and oozing pus. She asked for and got a hot water bath for her feet. "Bliss!" She said.

Rachel and Anka's pregnancies were also revealed about this time. If found out before 18 January they were each have been sent to Auschwitz for extermination.

Priska's labor began on 12 April, 1945 and she was assisted by prisoner Dr. Mautnerova, without drugs or any sterile equipment, delivering an anemic and malnourished baby on a wooden plank while an Allied air raid was occurring, so sad her dear husband Tibor couldn't share in the birth, not knowing if he was even alive. This baby who had survived so much violence, bitter winter, Auschwitz, and six months labor in Freiberg had pushed her way into war torn Europe. Without Edita's help they wouldn't have survived. The bag of bones comprising her baby Priska thought so beautiful, was named Hana Edith Lowenbein. Hana had been the name she and Tibor had agreed for a girl in the jammed cattle car on the way to Auschwitz.

On April 14 all were given notice to evacuate the camp within one hour to avoid the Soviets. Realizing they were losing the military offensive, many Nazis were determined to not lose the one against the Jews and continued to gas or shoot them before evacuating the camps. Some were still considered of use to the Reich as it would need slave labor. In the final six months of the war of the estimated 700,000 surviving camp prisoners who'd survived, 300,000 were to perish.

At Auschwitz on January 18, 1945, Filip Muller reported of great commotion occurring in the camp as they were lined up and the last roll call in Auschwitz occurred. Smoke could be seen coming from all over the camp as the SS men burned records. Then told to get ready for transport, Filip, along with 60,000 survivors, many just walking skeletons, were marched forty kilometers in the bitter cold and snow. Those too weak or sick lasted a few hours. Those too exhausted were shot by the guards and left by the way side. A few managed to escape when it was dark. 15,000 died in route on the three days march. Arriving at the Loslau railway station they were herded into open cattle cars to be sent deeper into Germany. The guards on the train had searchlights and machine guns to kill anyone trying to escape. After several days without rations in the freezing cold, many died. They arrived at Mauthausen, another slave and death camp, where prisoners from many nations, but especially Jews, were worked to death in the quarries supplying the Reich with fine granite. Filip was transferred along with hundreds of others to Melk to dig tunnels in the local hillside to continue war production. He felt himself starving on the rations given them and volunteered as an electrician to working in a Messerschmitt aircraft factory, even though he wasn't one. A fellow prisoner guided him. In a few days it all ground to a halt as Allied aircraft pounded the rail lines and roads all around. They spent most of their time in the air raid shelters, beat into them by the SS guards, realizing the collapse of the Third Reich was days away. With no rations they took to eating grass, lubricating jelly, and even the heavy, rich soil, willing themselves to survive and not die in what was surely the last days of this daily horror.

Then they were given a bread ration and started marching in a dusty column southwest guarded by SS men. After a few kilometers some started to collapse and were shot. Filip, with some more men, were ordered to gather the bodies in a wagon and take them to be dumped into a large hole in a local cemetery. Again, Filip thought with irony, I'm disposing of bodies. As they passed through some hamlets small piles of fruit and food was left and the prisoners ate desperately and stowed what they could in the rags they wore. The march ended at a barracks near Wels inside a few wooden barracks. No SS men were to be seen. Rumors abounded about what Allies were near and when. A couple of days passed while his

physical and spiritual state was deteriorating rapidly as Filip watched impassively scores of lice crawl all over the blanket he had. Soon he heard machine guns and the bursting of shells. People burst into the barracks shouting, "We are free, Comrades, we are free!" Incredibly, for Filip, it was a complete anti-climax. All that had kept him going for three years had been concentrated on this. Now he was just numb inside, feeling nothing at all. He struggled outside and across a road where he fell asleep on the forest floor. He awoke to the sound of a long column of American tanks rumbling past. With the convoy of steel giants he realized at last that the Nazi terror had ended.

Martin Weiss and the other inmates were forced marched west through bitter cold and rainy snow with his fellow prisoners from the tunnel complex they had been digging for eleven months in Melk, Austria, a satellite camp of Mauthausen concentration camp. They arrived at Gunskirchen, another sub-camp of Mauthausen. His father had died from starvation and overwork in the tunnels. In the tunnels they were fed a starvation diet of foul smelling watery gruel just enough to keep them alive and working. Martin told how during this march of days and nights without food or water that watery gruel would have tasted so good.

At Gunskirchen they were liberated by the American Army. Martin wasn't for sure, so he stayed in the camp for another day. The next day he ventured out, saw the American soldiers, and saw that yes, they were free. He said it was like seeing sunshine for the first time.

He came to the United States and spent three years in the U.S. Army during the Korean War. He settled in New York City and started a successful grocery business there. He and his cousin, who had also worked digging the tunnels in Austria for the Reich war production, also moved to New York and he and Martin saw each other and their growing families quite frequently. For 55 years, they never spoke one word about their Holocaust experiences to each other or anyone.

In July of 2018 at the United States Holocaust Center in Washington D.C., I was afforded the rare privilege of spending an entire hour talking with Mr. Weiss, who wanted us to call him "Marty". I knew I was talking to a true star of History.

As Wendy Holden related in her excellent book, "Born Survivors", Priska and her new baby Hana, along with all the women from KZ Freiberg were given the order to immediately evacuate. Priska shouldn't have been moved and Hana needed to be in an incubator. They and thirty five other sick women only made it a few hundred meters marching in the rain and were finally ordered to stop. The other women ordered to go on were crying and hugging them, thinking Priska's group would be shot. Instead they were put on a sealed truck.

They feared they were being taken to a remote location and shot, or were being sent to Chelmno and gassed or gassed by the truck's exhaust fumes. Baby Hana was lethargic and her skin was blistering. They arrived at a train station where the other women cheered to see them. All 990 women were put in open cattle cars with a few closed cars. Some of the open cars were knee deep in coal soot and others had slaked lime that burned the feet.

The spring weather turned cold with rain turning to sleet. The women only had thin blankets with the sleet wind whipping into them. Squashed into one of the open wagons, Priska struggled to protect her baby from the crush and found a small space to lay along side the rest of the women.

Rachel was close to giving birth. Anka, nine months pregnant was a "walking skeleton in rags" was squeezed into one of the open coal wagons. Klara Loffova said in her car they couldn't all sit at the same time they were so crowded. In the darkening rainy, snow storm temperatures dropped well below zero, they didn't know if they were headed to all be exterminated and were given no food or water. "It was hellish."

"We didn't know where we were going but we were so very afraid." Said Lisa Mikova. They were afraid they were headed to Flossenbug where 100,000 prisoners had passed



through, with a third dying, including 3,500 Jews. They didn't know Flossenburg had been evacuated two days prior and the 16,000 surviving prisoners sent on a forced death march, then cattle car to Dachau in Germany. Half perished before arriving and the majority left died of starvation and exhaustion or were gassed.

On Priska's train Gerty Taussig said they could only see up to watch the planes fighting and Allied bombers heading to targets. "The guards would let us out occasionally to relieve ourselves but they were always watching. We tried scratching at the grass between the tracks. It was all we had to eat unless they threw some bread into our wagon, and then there'd be a big fight as everybody wanted a crumb." Most were so parched they couldn't eat what little they got.

Whenever the train stopped the guards would open the doors for the prisoners to throw the dead out. They saw almost daily other trains pass in both directions full of prisoners with striped uniforms. Going through Czech stations with home town names of many of the prisoners were especially difficult as Hana Fischerova from Plzen said, "...Knowing we are home but having to go on to an unknown place from where we expect never to return."

The Czech men and women came to the tracks, braving the threats of the guards to shoot them and threw food to the women in the cars hollering, "Zustat Nazivu!" Stay Alive! Assuring them the war would soon be over, but the train continued on.

Plagued with lice, starving, their bodies wasting away beneath their horribly soiled clothes and hope wasting away too, those who died were stacked in the car corners until they were rolled off in places that bore no witness. Eight women died in Gerty Taussig's wagon the first week. "At fourteen years old, all I could feel was gratitude that there was a little more space for the rest of us."

The prisoners were plagued more by a terrible thirst than even hunger. A woman guard surprised Rachel by suddenly spoon feeding her a little food and water. The others in the wagon were suspicious by this change of heart from a guard, but Rachel didn't care.

These once beautiful, cultured young women, many of whom had represented the cream of their societies in Europe's finest cities were now crawling with vermin, reeking with the foulest odors, their teeth falling out, and their flesh broken out in sores. Most hadn't seen their reflection in months if not years. "The coal dust caked and was sort of greasy and you felt not like a human at all. It was just dreadful." Said Anka. Most stopped talking and retreated into their own private hell. The women begged the stony eyed SS officers for water but they offered none.

Priska tried feeding baby Hana but there was little substance in the drops of milk coming forth from her flattened breasts. She should have been eating 500 calories more per day than a normal pre-war diet. Around April 18 they were put on a siding near the heavily industrialized town of Most while munitions and troop trains went past. Most was repeatedly bombed by Allied bombers. Then their train turned around and headed away from the approaching American front.

Clearly visible from the air, their train was caught between Most and Chomutix when the two cities came under a major aerial assault on April 19. In the middle of the night, in the midst of an air raid, Rachel's water broke. As the Allied bombs shook the ground all around, she went into labor. Sprawled on the feces-covered floor in which lay several women who'd recently died, Rachel, shivering in her water logged blanket, felt the contractions ripple through her body. She knew the baby she had conceived with her husband Monik in the Lodz ghetto in what seemed like a lifetime ago was determined to push its way into the world.

The Czech doctor Edita Mautnerova, who'd helped Priska give birth to Hana in Freiberg was found and guards held up a torch so the doctor could see as the women all crowded around. The baby's head started to appear. Illuminated by anti-aircraft fire as rain soaked her skin, Rachel arched back against the wagon, fighting the pain. Later that night or early the next morning with a final scream Rachel gave bloody birth to a tiny creature. A boy it was, "Another Jew for the Fuhrer!" One of the SS guards cried, laughing.

In that squalor an SS guard handed the doctor a dirty razor blade to cut the umbilical. An empty bread box was found. In the rain and snow Rachel held the baby in the box. Incredibly she had a little breast milk and was able to nurse her newborn some.

A guard gave her an old dirty shirt to wrap the baby in. Rachel dared to ask if she could see her two other sisters on the train. A guard actually walked down the train calling for Sala and Ester. Afraid to answer at first they were told their sister just had a son. They were surprised when told they could go see her. They found her in a corner with dead and dying women near by in the stinking wagon. "She was so ill...We were crying because we thought we'd never see either of them again."

Anka was starving. Some pieces of bread was thrown into their car. "...It was indescribable," Anka said. Encumbered by her bump, she couldn't scramble for the pieces. "I was the epitome of living hunger." They found it was Hitler's birthday. The same as Hanka's. A guard found that out and tossed her a piece of bread. They were heading south to Pilzen, Czechoslovakia. The U.S. Army Second Infantry with Pop was also only days from getting there. It was also the place of the huge Skoda Armaments complex which the city and rail lines had repeatedly been bombed by the U.S. military to prevent any further manufacturing of Panzers, howitzers or tank destroyers. Then the Americans drew up plans to wipe it out and keep it out of Soviet hands. Three hundred B-17 Flying Fortress bombers and two hundred fighters planned to hit it on April 25.

The train with Rachel, Priska with their babies just skin and bones, and Anka holding onto her swollen belly, was diverted to a town of 3,000 inhabitants called Horni Briza where the Czech station master Antonin Pavlicek, insisted on inspecting the train. He was shocked to see the cadaverous creatures sick and dying of starvation and disease and the smell. He estimated 3,000 prisoners, one third men and the rest women. He mustered the townspeople to bring food and soup to the women. He argued with the SS commandant but bribed the SS also with food to get it done.

Priska was one of the lucky women to receive food and even clothes for Hana. Pressing the beautiful embroidered baby clothes donated by a local doctor's wife to her face, she smelled starch and fresh linen, reminding her of a time when being clean was the norm. She was reluctant to touch them with her soot-blackened hands and put them on Hana's body with its running sores.

Anka was spotted by a local farmer, in total sudden shock by her dirty skin and bones around a swollen belly, without hair on her head. The SS commandant, with a gun and whip stared at the farmer. The farmer bravely brought back a glass of milk. "I hate milk,...but I took it...and drank that milk, which was like the elixir of life. I enjoyed it like nothing on earth...it was like nectar...I think at the time it may have saved my life. After that glass I was as strong as an ox. That glass of milk brought my humanity back."

The SS man had raised his whip as if to beat Anka with it, but the farmer was so stunned in looking at what the SS man was about to do, the SS man for some reason lowered his whip and Anka escaped the beating. Nineteen men and women died on the train that day at Horni Briza and their bodies were thrown onto the tracks. Mr. Pavlicek insisted they be given a proper burial. Klara Loffova said, "The whole village came with soup and bread...It seemed like a miracle. We thought this was home; these were our people and we were theirs."

The transport had been through several countries where no one seemed to see them. Liska Rudolf said, "Only in Czechoslovakia the people have heart...We will never forget Horni Briza."

Tragically, some on the train received nothing as the SS guards kept a lot of the food, lying that they would more efficiently pass it out. Mr. Pavlicek tried to convince the SS commander to leave all the prisoners there, that the town would take care of them, and for he and his guards to escape, but the SS man wouldn't budge. The train continued south.

Pilzen was passed and other towns when through the slits in the cars people would sound out the town names. A woman might holler, "That's my hometown!" or "My family lives there!" as the achingly beautiful countryside rolled by in the brightening spring weather.

At another Czech town called Besiny, the townspeople brought bread, buns, salami, and soup but it all had to be taken to the SS kitchen in the lie that the SS would organize and pass it out, and the people on the train got nothing. The dead were tossed off and the filth pushed out of the cars by the prisoners.

In one remote stop a Czech partisan broke through the floor and helped several prisoners to escape. Many in that car were too scared or weak to try. When the SS found out they beat the women in the car to find out who had helped them, but most were past caring. Many lay down and died. Others were unraveling mentally. Liska Rudolf said, "The prisoners were howling with hunger...some were going crazy because of hunger, the eyes shining as beasts in the dark night."

The train changed direction and after enduring so many years of survival, emotional surrender raced throughout the cars with one possible route left to a place almost as feared as Auschwitz: Mauthausen. Even the Nazis called it, "The bone grinder."

There and at two satellite camps, the prisoners were worked to death in quarries. There was a total of forty satellite camps with an unlimited supply of slave labor turning massive profits for the SS.

There in December 1941, the famous Czech singer-songwriter Karel Hasler had been murdered by being stripped naked, repeatedly doused in ice-water until he froze solid into a human ice cycle. This was done at times with other prisoners in other camps in the Reich.

Mauthausen was on a beautiful bluff beside the Danube River. Its granite was sold all over the Reich with the SS making a fortune from the slave labor, even into 1945. More than sixty methods of murder were used at Mauthausen including beatings, shootings, hangings, medical experiments, injection with petrol, and various forms of torture. The Soviet prisoners were the worst treated. Not only worked to death, they were given half rations and made to sleep naked in windowless huts. Out of 4,000 interned there, less than two hundred survived. In February 1945 four hundred Russian prisoners managed to escape. Most froze to death or were shot when found. 57 were recaptured and only eleven of the 400 survived to see the end of the war.

Anywhere close to Mauthausen or its forty satellite camps, the strong smell of human waste and dead bodies pervaded the air all around.

The death toll was unknown with many prisoners killed in a mobile van or in a nearby castle to be gassed, until in 1941 prisoners were ordered to build their own gas chamber. A crematorium was built so to better dispose of the bodies with the ashes put in the forest or the Danube. The townspeople would look at the horrible treatment until the SS threatened to shoot the onlookers. One stone mason from the town, sacked for complaining about the brutal treatment of the prisoners was sent to Buchenwald, so the people kept quiet. A married, family manager of a warehouse across from the camp was discovered by a guard throwing bread to arriving inmates, arrested and sent to his death at Dachau. But many fraternized with the 400 SS staff and the well paid SS men gave the town a lot of business all those years.

Mauthausen and its subcamps included quarries, munitions factories, mines, arms factories and plants assembling Me 262 fighter aircraft. In January 1945, the camps contained roughly 85,000 inmates. The death toll remains unknown, although most sources place it between 122,766 and 320,000 for the entire complex, with more than 30,000 being Jews.

Train 90124 arrived at Mauthausen railway station, with many failing to survive the last few days. Wild looking creatures, as Wendy Holden related in her book, *Born Survivors*; those still alive were shocked and dazzled by the light suddenly streaming into the wagons that had been sealed, emerging bug-eyed and delirious, pushed into ragged columns on a ramp just a few hundred meters from the sparkling Danube. Anka saw on the wall opposite

her in big black letters, MANTHAUSEN. The sight rammed home the truth on that bitterly cold 29 April, but also frightened her so she suddenly started her contractions.

Lisa Mikova saw the station name and knew it was something like Auschwitz. We said, "Okay, that is the same, so this is the end...It was terrible how we looked – skin and bones skeletons. So dirty and full of lice. We looked dead already."

Anka, paralyzed with pain and horror, grabbing the wagon door, trying to conceal she was about to give birth, thinking of when she conceived in Terezin when her loved ones at the same time had most likely gone up the flue at Birkenau, she feared the worst. She had fought giving birth in an open coal wagon, now she could only think she was about to deliver a child that would most likely be thrown straight into a gas chamber along with its mother.

She was thrown on top of other sick and dying women in a cart going up to the top of the hill where Mauthausen was. Laying feverish and disorientated among the sweaty bodies, she found herself looking out at the beautiful countryside as her water broke in all that filth and vermin.

She noticed the beautiful spring evening, the fields turning green and the Danube below, thinking this was the last nice thing she would see on Earth. Her contractions worsened. The cart was smelly and muddy, women were dying and millions of lice crawled all over everything. Unconscious women were lying across her legs as she sat up as her baby started coming out between her legs. Her only fear was it wouldn't survive. She saw the Russian prisoner doctor who had worked in the Freiberg infirmary and called for her to help her, but the lady just waved her hand and shrugged and walked the other way as they came up to the camp's wooden gates with the towering granite watchtowers. She was loaded squashed into an open wagon along with the other women and slowly taken to the camp infirmary. She tried to stifle her screams for fear of the SS. The guard closest to her said, "Du kannst weiter schreien" (You can keep on screaming.) She didn't know if he was being kind or sarcastic, but decided to give her voice free reign and raged freely, convinced those were her last moments on Earth.

The baby came out in a mess of blood and mucus as she sat up with the other women lying across her. The baby was tiny and for some minutes didn't stir. Suddenly a prisoner doctor ran out, she found out later he had been the chief obstetrician of a hospital in Belgrade. He cut the umbilical cord, slapped the baby's bottom. It started to cry. Everything was fine. He told her, "It's a boy." Somebody wrapped it in a paper and suddenly Anka was terribly happy.

Rachel and her baby had been loaded onto a similar cart along with others and driven to the camp, only to be put into a tattered line and told to wait. The camp was losing all organization. Food was virtually non-existent, disease was out of control, and an estimated eight hundred inmates a day were estimated to be dying at Mauthausen and its sub-camps. They were herded fifty at a time down some steps and told they were taking showers. From Auschwitz they knew what showers meant. Terribly weak, she hid her baby Mark under her dress. 1,400 prisoners had been gassed there the past few weeks. The day before, April 28, thirty-three Austrian communists, along with five Polish prisoners, four Croatians and an Austrian who was also a British national had also been executed. This had happened even with the Red Cross in the camp to negotiate the evacuation of hundreds of French and Benelux prisoners.

She resigned herself to never see her husband Monik, her brave brother Moniek, or her younger siblings and her parents who had been at the mercy of Dr. Mengele and his group. She, her baby and her group were pushed into a large tiled chamber with sinister looking pipes, knowing they were to die, thinking this a suitable end to the wretched existence under the Nazis forced on her and her family since the invasion of Poland six years earlier. But nothing happened. They never knew if the gas chamber had been sabotaged or the Nazis ran out of gas.

One of the Germans said, "Don't worry, we will put them in the Russian camp and the lice will eat them to death."

They were pushed out onto the parade ground, as rain began to fall and they were given a little soup and water delivered by the Red Cross. They were forced to sit in the cold and wait for the rest of the ragged skeletons considered to be strong enough to stagger up the hill by themselves. It took them hours to get up the hill said Rachel.

They were pushed through a gate in a fence of 2,000 volts and locked into one of the huts at the Russian camp. With nothing but straw and bedbugs women were dying in each other's arms.

Gerty Taussig said, "...We were lying half dead in our own waste...we were waiting to die."

It took Priska carrying her baby two hours to make it up the hill. As they were marched through the town of Mauthausen with its pretty window boxes and half timbered houses, some inhabitants spat at them and told them they would all die when they reached the top of the hill.

These same locals waved to the guards, inviting them to social events or the cinema that night. A beautiful fountain in the center of town was an instant magnet as the desperately thirsty women ran to it only to be chased away by the locals throwing stones and the guards beating them and pulling them back into line.

Priska, so desperate for her baby to live, trudged up the long path up the hill along with the others, so parched they grabbed flowers and wolfed them down. Finally at dusk, arriving in the camp's courtyard, they were shocked to have coffee and cake from the Red Cross served to them. Many could barely swallow they were so thirsty. A brick chimney towered over them as they were made to wait two hours for what they were sure would be their extermination. Some nearby male prisoners then told them the gas chambers weren't working anymore and that the guards no longer cared about them as they were looking to get away, that help wasn't far away. They didn't know if they could believe them as they could still be killed anytime.

An SS officer told another one the women would be taken to the gypsy camp. As they were herded together, Priska's baby Hana moaned. A female Kapo cried, "Ein Baby! Ein Baby!" Another Kapo rushed forward with outstretched hands for Hana, "No children here!"

With strength she didn't know she had, Priska fought them, spitting and clawing at them as each of the Kapo's grabbed Hana's little skinny legs in a deadly tug of war. Priska fought like a savage, "Nein!" She screamed.

This went in for several minutes with Priska's treasured layette trampled into the mud underneath, forever lost. Suddenly an older female Kapo place a hand on Priska shoulder and raised her hand to the other two who immediately let go. "I haven't seen a baby in six years." She said in German. "I should like to spend some time with her." She took Hana to the guards barracks as Hana stood watching through the window in total anxiety as the guard dangled a piece of chocolate on a string over Hana's mouth. Hana's feet and hands jerked in delight. After an hour she wrapped Hana in her dirty smock, gave her back to Priska with a brusque "Here", ordered the other two to escort Priska to the gypsy camp and walked off.

Inside Priska could see the terribly dirty barracks was a place where people were left to rot. There was shouting and shooting all the next day. Everyone was scared to go outside. Some male prisoners brought them what little food they had. Lisa Mikova was so weak and feverish she couldn't eat and watched impassively as another woman came to pry the bread from her hand.

Anka, with baby Mark, in the filthy infirmary, suddenly found the Germans couldn't do enough for them. She found their attitude "cloying and horrible" as the day before they would have killed them and now we were the "chosen" people. After allowing baby Mark to sleep she found her breasts full of milk and the baby drank hungrily. She was then given a bowl of

macaroni swimming in fat. After only a few morsels of bread for weeks, she devoured the whole bowl, getting terrible diarrhea and was extremely sick. She weathered it to live.

In the gypsy camp the women had become even dirtier and it was difficult to breath with the excrement and decomposing human flesh. There were sounds of explosions in the distance and still even from the quarry. Stronger male inmates were still instructed to carry granite from the quarry, but the camp atmosphere was changing. Fewer Germans were around, old timers moved freely about, caring for the others and telling them to hang on. Most of the Red Cross parcels brought in were taken by the fleeing Nazis.

Most were unaware in the early hours of May 3, the SS commandant for the previous six years, Frank Ziereis, ordered his men to leave. Older German soldiers and fire police, drafted from Vienna came in to take over. Ziereis' men scattered to the winds as he and his wife escaped to his hunting lodge. He was later captured and killed.

That day a French officer, just released to the Red Cross along with his group from the camp, managed to get a message to Allied authorities that tens of thousands of prisoners at Mauthausen and its satellite camps were likely to be killed following a letter from Himmler ordering the destruction of anything seen as evidence against the Nazis. The officer said the Germans are planning to exterminate these completely, that gas, dynamite and barges for mass drownings have been called forward, and that massacres had started when he left the camp.

Two days later a platoon of twenty three U.S. Army soldiers in six vehicles, led by Sgt. Albert J. Kosiek, who were on a reconnaissance mission to scout bridges in the area, was persuaded by an agitated Red Cross delegate to come to Gusen and Mauthausen. Sgt. Kosiek was the son of Polish immigrants to the U.S. His lieutenant had recently been killed in action. He turned down a promotion to stay with his men. They were from the "Thunderbolts" the 11<sup>th</sup> Armored Division of the Third Army.

At first he thought the fort on the hill was some sort of huge factory until he started smelling the foul odors coming from it and found it to be a factor of another kind, a death factory. They came across thousands of saucer eyed creatures, many unashamedly naked, men and women, behind the high stone walls, many catatonic and on the verge of collapse. "They hardly resembled human beings. Some couldn't have weighed over forty pounds. It made we wonder what kept them alive."

In spite of their condition, as soon as they saw the Americans drive through the gates, the prisoners went wild with joy, screaming and yelling and crying in a discord of languages. While urging the prisoners to stay calm, he radioed headquarters to try with great difficulty in describing what he had found. His platoon had come across bodies lying along the sides of roads, shot or dead from exhaustion in the death marches recently taken place, but they weren't prepared to see this that they would never be able to forget.

Stunned, Sgt. Kosiek formally accepted the surrender of the Austrian and German guards. The rest of the guards had tried disguising themselves by putting on the striped uniforms, but were found out and many killed in an explosion of anger, especially the surviving Russians, beating to death their former killers with their bare hands. Other prisoners caught guards, throwing them onto the electric fences where their bodies remained for days. Others were cut open and butchered or stamped to death by the wooden clogs the prisoners were issued.

At the Gusen sub-camp Sgt. Kosiek and his platoon had already witnessed some of this as Kapos and guards were subjected to mass lynchings by the prisoners. At Mauthausen the main camp kitchen was raided as inmates stuffed fistfuls of flour and skeletal prisoners wrestled on the floor for scraps. Sgt. Kosiek fired his pistol three times to try and maintain order.

The Americans were given a guided tour by inmates among which was a professor who spoke perfect English. They saw the ovens going full blast consuming bodies, many recently killed prisoners with their heads split open, though the gas chambers were stilled.

Knowing he and his men couldn't remain in the camp that night, Sgt. Kosiek arranged a committee of inmates to be put in charge to prevent further riots and killings of any remaining Kapos and prostitutes. He threatened if order wasn't maintained the Americans would pull out and leave them to the Nazis. The remaining guards begged to go with them and so they took most of them. He promised that the U.S. Army would come in force the next day.

The inmates were suddenly scared again, that one they would get no food, and the other that the Nazis would come back. They gathered what weapons they could and stood ready to defend themselves to the death. By day's end, May 5, they were all officially free. Sgt. Kosiek, the twenty seven year old son of Polish immigrants, had liberated some 40,000 prisoners at Mauthausen and Gusen as well as accepting the surrender of 1,800 German POWs.

Priska knew about the arrival of the Americans because of something she hadn't heard in years, laughter, "A most beautiful thing." She rose from her hollow of soiled straw, spotting three vehicles with white stars, carrying young looking soldiers, none wearing German uniforms. So that is what Americans look like. After dreaming so long about Allied liberators, seeing such beings in the flesh seemed like an illusion. Everything about them was different, their uniforms, their helmets, even the way they walked, talked, and smelled.

A young American medic, who had patched up men in the field and being wounded amid shelling during the Battle of the Bulge, said, "I had seen a lot before I got to that camp, but I was more affected by seeing the people that were starved and were just skin and bones." He reached the hut where the men slept five to a bunk, finding a "skeleton" with a weak pulse who died before his eyes. He had been warned about getting too close because of all the vermin and infectious diseases, but the prisoners just swarmed him. The guards who tried to disguise themselves were found and beaten to death by the inmates. The medic, Specialist LeRoy Petersohn was helpless to stop them.

Priska heard the voices of the Americans, and as a former tutor of English, cried for help. Thankful the one coming in was a medic, she opened the bundle wrapped around her baby, covered in boils caused by malnutrition. Both were severely malnourished, dehydrated, with the baby suffering from a massive infection, covered in lice 'bigger than her' Pete said.

Pete called a doctor, Major Harold G. Stacy, who said they needed to operate on the boils immediately and telling Priska in German, who begged to go with them, they would make Hana well, as they left in a jeep without Priska, with the baby cradled in Dr. Stacy's arms. They took Hana to a facility where Dr. Stacy could properly operate on her. Both men knew thousands needed attention and they were facing epidemics of typhus and other diseases.

The doctor tackled each of the numerous abscesses and had sent Pete for the new wonder drug, penicillin. Hana was brought back to her alive and Dr. Stacy told her later those weeks in the coal wagon had almost killed the baby.

Upon liberation many prisoners were too exhausted to appreciate they were free, their minds couldn't grasp it. Rachel said, "Too weak and too empty to feel happiness."

Many, desperate to get away, in case the Nazis came back, staggered like drunks out the open camps gates, only to die right outside from the exertion. Some made it to town where they begged for food with most being given something. The Americans stopped letting anyone out as they told them they needed to be medically assessed as to their health and what was needed for them.

Told that the Soviets would take over the camp and this area on 28 July 1945, the Jews used that as their deadline to get to the American lines as they feared the Soviets almost as much as the Nazis.

The Allied commanders ordered all townspeople in their Sunday best to come see the horror they had helped support all these years. They and German POWs were also made to care for those living, clean out or burn the lice laden barracks, work in the quarry, do all the dehumanizing things the prisoners had been forced to do.

There were between eight and nine million survivors of the war who were placed into Displaced Persons (DP) Camps. For many the very places they had lived such horror



became the holding places where they received care, clothing, and food. There were 2,500 such camps throughout Germany, Italy, Switzerland, England, and Austria. A Central Tracing Bureau was set up and every survivor was interviewed with forms filled out. So many though could not prove who they were beyond the number on their arm or the one memorized from their morning Appelle-roll call in the many camps. Not only were most physically and psychologically damaged, but they had no clothes, no money, and no documents. They had the mounting uncertainty of what would be waiting for them when entire communities they were from had been wiped off the face of the Earth. The Allies had agreed to repatriate all survivors, but many felt unable to return to Germany, Poland, or the Soviet Union, where whole communities had been massacred and there was still widespread hatred of Jews. An unknown number were murdered after they made it back to where they grew up. Most found some other family living in their homes. For years many people in Europe were in turmoil.

Many dreamed of going to the U.S., England, Israel, or Australia. Klara Loffova, right after being liberated, was befriended by a nineteen year old U.S. soldier, named Max, from Brooklyn, New York. He brought her extra food and cigarettes, which became valuable currency in the camp. When it came time for her to say goodbye Max formally introduced himself. She drew back her hand as she was still infested with lice and ingrained with filth, but he took her hand and kissed it. She never forgot that kindness, eventually made her way to America and the incident became such a part of her family's history her grandson was named Max in his honor.

Priska so wanted to take Hana back to Bratislava, convinced Tibor would be there waiting on them. Rachel's husband Monik, and Anka's husband Bernd's whereabouts were unknown. The whip smart journalist Tibor, the loyal factory owner Monik, and the handsome architect Bernd.

At least Rachel had her three young sisters who had survived. So many lost everyone in their families. The country of Poland, with three and a half million Jews at the beginning of the war, now only had three hundred thousand left alive. 1,500 Jews were murdered when they returned to their communities in Poland, due mainly to anti-Semitic reasons. The country of Poland itself lost 20% of its entire population in the war, caught as it were between the brutal regimes of the Soviets and the Nazis. As of this writing in 2019, there are only around 4,000 Jews living in the nation of Poland.



It's Friday, the 13th of April, 1945. A few miles northwest of Magdeburg there was a railroad siding in wooded ravine not far from the Elbe River. Major Clarence L. Benjamin in a jeep was leading a small task force of two light tanks on a routine job of patrolling. The unit came upon some 200 shabby looking civilians by the side of the road. There was something immediately apparent about each one of these people, men and women, which arrested the attention. Each one of them was skeleton thin with starvation, a sickness in their faces and the way in which they stood-and there was something else. At the sight of Americans they began laughing in joy-if it could be called laughing. It was an outpouring of pure, near-hysterical relief. The tankers soon found out why. The reason was found at the railroad siding.

Picture was taken by Major Clarence L. Benjamin at the instant a few of the train people saw the tanks and first realized they had been liberated.

On the hill to the left are people resting – some forever. Some sixteen died of starvation before food could be brought to the train.



Bit by bit, as the Major found some who spoke English, the story came out. This had been—and was—a horror train. This train which contained about 2,500 Jews, had a few days previously left the Bergen-Belsen death camp. Men, women and children, were all loaded into a few available railway cars, some passenger and some freight, but mostly the typical antiquated freight cars, termed as “40 and 8” a WWI terminology. This signified that these cars would accommodate 40 men or 8 horses. They were crammed into all available space and the freight cars were packed with about 60 – 70 people, with standing room only for most of them, so that they were packed in like sardines.



As war came to an end, three trains were sent from Bergen-Belsen on April 10, 1945 with the purpose to move eastward from the Camp, to the Elbe River, where they were informed that it would not be advisable to proceed further because of the rapidly advancing Russian Army. The train then reversed direction and proceeded to Farsleben, where they were then told that they were heading into the advancing American Army. Consequently, the train halted at Farsleben. The engineers had then received their orders, to drive the train to, and onto the bridge over the Elbe River, and either blow it up, or just drive it off the end of the damaged bridge, with all of the cars of the train crashing into the river, and killing or drowning all of the occupants. The engineers were having some second thoughts about this action, as they too would be hurtling themselves to death also this is the point at which they were discovered, just shortly after the leading elements of the 743rd Tank Battalion arrived on the scene.



Most of these Jews were from Poland, Russia and other Eastern countries, so with the total destruction of their homes, loss of families and the serious prospects of coming under the jurisdiction of the Soviets, most were fearful about their future. Most chose the option of remaining in Germany, or the possibility of being repatriated to some other Western European countries. Eventually, many were finally repatriated to Israel, South American countries, for which many had passports, England, Canada and to the United States of America. The little boy seems pleased to have his picture taken.



The Nazis often killed large groups of prisoners before, during, or after marches. During one march, 7,000 Jewish prisoners, 6,000 of them women, were moved from camps in the Danzig region bordered on the north by the Baltic Sea. On the ten-day march, 700 were murdered. Those still alive when the marchers reached the shores of the sea were driven into the water and shot. (Photo credit: U.S. Army / George C. Gross — *A Train Near Magdeburg* / [Matthew Rozell](#) — *World War II Living History Project*)

## Chapter Sixty Eight

After weeks of being cared for, the survivors were given food, clothing, and care packages for trips. They filed out of Mauthausen in a long column of people, waiting for trucks to take them to the station. All these with once such promising futures, now penniless refugees.

In six years the Nazis had killed two thirds of the nine and a half million Jews living in Europe, as well as millions of non-Jews. Eighty percent of Czechoslovakia's Jews had been exterminated.

Priska made it home with Hana to Bratislava on 22 May, but had to get Hana operated on again at the Children's Hospital. The baby was saved. The nuns there saw Priska also needed care and gave her ample food and a place to stay until she was much better. She and Hana finally made it home only to discover her and Tibor's apartment building a pile of rubble. Huge noteboards were set up by the Jewish community in the center of town, which overall the town had remained largely intact, for people to leave messages for loved ones. But there was never any sign of Tibor. After months of daily checking the messages, she ran into a man who told her he thought he saw what happened to Tibor, from the slave camp at Gliwice, to avoid the Russians, they were forced marched through temperatures reaching minus twenty degrees to another camp forty kilometers away. Tibor, in a terribly weakened state, had given up hope on Priska and the baby he knew she was carrying would survive. He had stopped caring for himself and barely ate anything, saying life wasn't worth living without his wife and child. The man said Tibor was dying of hunger at the end of January, 1945. That he had fallen down by the side of the road and probably been shot. She would never know for sure.

She did learn from family friends that her mother and father, who had been sent to Auschwitz in July 1942, were gassed within a month of their arrival there.

The rest of her life she refused to remarry. "I had a great marriage with my husband...I couldn't live with anyone else or find anyone else like him." She went back to school, after teaching highschool, became a professor of languages at the university. She was devoted to Hana all her life. "For me she is the dearest girlfriend, daughter, my whole life."

In 1960 she took Hana to the town of Horni Briza in Czechoslovakia where the towns people had saved their lives. The brave, caring station master, Mr. Pavlicek had passed away but they thanked the townspeople for what they did. She also took Hana to Mauthausen where Hana got upset in seeing the pictures of those gassed to death the day before Priska's arrival there.

In August 1968 when the Soviet army tanks moved in to crush the Prague Spring's move to democracy in Czechoslovakia, Hana, now grown and married, moved first with Priska and her family to Israel where she got her PhD in organic chemistry, and then to Chicago. Priska passed away at ninety in the U.S.

Rachel and her three sisters made it home to Pabianice, Poland in keeping a promise to their father. Of the 12,000 Jews deported from there, only 500 were left alive, with Rachel's

baby Mark being the only baby to survive. Their parent's once beautiful apartment had a former employee living there who said the communist government had given it to him.

All their fine china and silverware was gone. Some loyal employees had saved some items for them and gave these back to them. These they were forced to sell to buy food. When they went out they were met with disparaging looks. Sala overheard one woman complaining, "They burned them and they burned them, and yet still so many are alive!"

She went to see her art teacher who'd loved her so much that she had painted a picture of Sala. "She will be so pleased to see me!" She was going to tell all that had happened to them. When the teacher opened the door she said, "You mean you're still alive? I don't have anything for you." And shut the door. It was a slap in the face to Sala. The hate and indoctrination of extreme prejudice of most of Europe had been so widespread.

An uncle in New York had been informed by the Polish authorities that their brother Barek was at a hospital in Sweden, after being sent there due to a loss of an eye and other injuries from the camps. They had to accept that their three younger brothers, sister and mother had been murdered at Auschwitz.

Barek had managed to keep his father and himself alive at Bergen-Belsen, but when a guard ordered him not to help his father with some task, he did anyway. The guard then kicked Barek in the face and he lost an eye. Their father, Shaiah, was shot dead three days before the camp was liberated. Bala, one of the sisters, suddenly announced she would go to Sweden and take care of Barek. This she did for years until he could function on his own.

The Jewish population of Lodz, Poland, which had been 200,000 before the war had dwindled to less than 40,000, most of whom moved away from there or emigrated to other countries. "We knew we didn't want to stay in Poland" said Sala. In all the world today there are estimated to be a total 17.5 million Jews. One estimate is 15 million.

The three sisters and baby Mark went to Munich with just the clothes on their backs and a couple of suitcases between them. A man who knew her brother Barek told Rachel that her husband Monik had managed to avoid the last transport to the camps out of Lodz but been shot later by a German on the streets.

Rachel married again, a talented Jewish jeweler, who himself had been married with a wife and baby son before the war. In a round up a German soldier had wrenched his baby out of his arms and Sol Orviesky (later shortened to Olsky) felt guilty for the rest of his life for not having fought the Nazi soldier harder for his son. Apart from two brothers and a nephew who'd fled to America before the war, he lost every member of his family, including his wife and child, and spent the entire war in a labor camp processing the belongings of the dead. He weighed less than seventy pounds at liberation and suffered serious health problems the rest of his life.

Through his work he was able to keep Rachel and her sisters solvent for years after the war. Rachel and Sol moved to Israel and in 1958 to the United States. He passed away after a series of heart attacks in 1967.

Their sister Ester married Abe Freeman from Pabianice. Abe had spent four years in Auschwitz and bore a tattoo. The couple moved to Nashville, Tennessee after a Jewish organization told them it 'wasn't far at all from New York'. But they had a very happy and successful life there in the country of their liberators.

Sala had first met Henrike in the Pabianice ghetto. He was the nephew of Sol Olsky. After the war she looked for him everywhere and after eight weeks he came back and asked her to marry him. They moved to the United States and "we had sixty-four wonderful years."

Bala married a Polish Jew in Sweden, named Jakob Feder, had two sons and never spoke to them about her war time experiences. When she passed away in 1986 both sons emigrated to Israel. Barek recovered in Sweden and moved to San Francisco, married a holocaust survivor and worked successfully in catering. The children of the Abramczyk family who survived the war had nine children and twenty grandchildren between them. It was, they said, their "happy ending".

Many survivors of the camps, for the rest of their lives would start at the sound of a train whistle, the squeal of air brakes, someone shouting, certain smells or someone saying oven or furnace or feel panic inside a closed space with other people such as an elevator or crowded commuter train. Some drove their families nuts with constantly checking on their food supplies, even getting up in the middle of the night to make sure the food was still there; and some would stay up at night pacing, unable to sleep. Many had health issues, but most picked themselves up and continued on to make very successful lives, raise families and children and contributed greatly to the nations and communities where they wound up living.

## Chapter Sixty Nine

### Mauthausen Concentration Camp in Austria



The Stairs of Death, meant having to carry granite blocks weighing up to 40 kg (88 lbs.) on a wooden frame on their backs to construction sites in the camp. The march up the quarry steps was accompanied by beatings from the guards. In 1941 and 1942, Dutch Jews especially were pushed to their deaths over the edge of the quarry cliff by the SS and Kapos, something recorded in official camp documents as 'suicide by jumping'. Some took days to die. The cynical name given by the SS to prisoners killed in this way was 'parachutists'. It started as steep shale cliff upon which the prisoner's bloody feet caused them to slide to their deaths. Then 186 steps were hewed into the steep stone slope.



Morning Appell or roll call

The Mauthausen and the two Gusen quarries were sites of forced labor and places of annihilation in equal measure. The prisoners were systematically worked to death. Back-breaking work as punishment and deliberate killing operations were part of everyday life. Mauthausen was the destination for many inmates arriving on death marches from other camps as the Nazis forced marched them away from the approaching Soviets.



Survivors of the Russian camp at  
Mauthausen

In early April 1945, as US forces approached, the Germans began to evacuate some 28,000 prisoners from the Buchenwald main camp and an additional several thousand prisoners from the subcamps of Buchenwald. About a third of these prisoners died from exhaustion en route or shortly after arrival to where they were driven, or were shot by the SS. The underground resistance organization in Buchenwald, whose members held key administrative posts in the camp, saved many lives. They obstructed Nazi orders and delayed the evacuation. On April 11, 1945, in expectation of liberation, starved and emaciated prisoners stormed the watchtowers, seizing control of the camp. Later that afternoon, US forces entered Buchenwald. Soldiers from the 6th Armored Division, part of the Third Army, found more than 21,000 people in the camp.



American soldiers at the Buchenwald gatehouse, April 1945



The Buchenwald concentration camp was liberated on April 11, 1945 by four soldiers in the Sixth Armored Division of the US Third Army, commanded by General George S. Patton. Just before the Americans arrived, the camp had already been taken over by the Communist prisoners who had killed some of the guards and forced the rest to flee into the nearby woods.

Pfc. James Hoyt was driving the M8 armoured vehicle which brought Capt. Frederic Keffer, Tech. Sgt. Herbert Gottschalk and Sgt. Harry Ward to the Buchenwald camp that day. From a CNN news story upon the death of James Hoyt on August 14, 2008, Capt. Keffer was the officer in command of the six-wheeled armored vehicle that day. The soldiers were part of the Army's 6<sup>th</sup> Armored Division near the camp when about 15 SS troopers were captured. It was mid-afternoon.

"At the same time, a group of Russians just escaped from the concentration camp, burst out of the woods attempting to attack the SS men. The Russians were restrained and interrogated," Maj. Gen. R.W. Grow, the American commander of the 6th Armored Division, wrote in a 1975 letter about the Buchenwald liberation.

Keffer was ordered to take his three comrades and two of the Russian prisoners "as guides to investigate, report and rejoin as rapidly as possible."

"I took this side journey of about 3 km away from our main force because we kept encountering SS guards and prison inmates, and the latter told us of the large camp to the south," Keffer wrote in a letter around the 30th anniversary of the liberation.

"We had been told by our intelligence that we might overrun a large prison camp, but we - or at least I -- had no idea of either the gigantic size of the camp or of the full extent of the incredible brutality."

Keffer and Gottschalk, who spoke German, entered the camp through a hole in an electric barbed wire fence.

"We were tumultuously greeted by what I was told were 21,000 men, and what an incredible greeting that was," Keffer wrote. "I was picked up by arms and legs, thrown into the air, caught, thrown again, caught, thrown, etc., until I had to stop it. I was getting dizzy."

"How the men found such a surge of strength in their emaciated condition was one of those bodily wonders in which the spirit sometimes overcomes all weaknesses of the flesh. My, but it was a great day!"

Keffer said the prisoners, through an underground system, had already taken control of the camp. The four soldiers notified division command to get medical help and food to the prisoners as soon as possible.

*The 6th Armored Division newspaper "Armored Attacker" ran a headline on May 5, 1945: "Four 9th AIB Doughs Find Buchenwald." The article described the discovery as "the worst concentration camp yet to be uncovered by west wall troops."*

On the morning of April 12, 1945, soldiers of the 80th Infantry Division arrived in the nearby town of Weimar and found it deserted except for some of the liberated prisoners roaming around. The townspeople were cowering in fear inside their bomb-damaged homes. They had good reason to be. As Eliezer Wiesel a Romanian-born American Jewish writer,

professor, political activist, Nobel Laureate, and Holocaust survivor of Auschwitz and now Buchenwald reported that some of the inmates drove in American jeeps to Weimar, where they looted homes, raped the women, and randomly killed German civilians.

Edward R. Murrow arrived in Weimar that day and reported in his famous radio broadcast from Buchenwald that the liberated prisoners were hunting down the SS soldiers who had escaped from the camp the day before and killing them while the Americans watched.

There were approximately 21,000 prisoners at Buchenwald on the day it was liberated. This included approximately 4,000 Jewish prisoners who were survivors of the death camps in what is now Poland, and 904 children under the age of 17, many of whom were orphans.

Regarding the liberation of Buchenwald on April 11, 1945, Robert Abzug wrote the following in his book "Inside the Vicious Heart": *The Americans were met by reasonably healthy looking, armed prisoners ready to help administer distribution of food, clothing, and medical care. These same prisoners, an International Committee with the Communist underground leader Hans Eiden at its head, seemed to have perfect control over their fellow inmates. The clock on top of the gatehouse shows 3:18 p.m., when they took control.*

T/4 Carroll E. Peterson was an 18-year old high school student who had never been more than 100 miles from his home town of Webster, South Dakota until he was drafted into the U.S. Army and sent to Europe with the 80th Infantry Division in 1944. He reported that one of the sights that he witnessed at Buchenwald, when he visited the camp for a couple of hours on April 12th, was the autopsy table where the skin of starved-to-death prisoners had been removed to make lamp shades.

Harry Snodgrass was a 23 year-old American soldier from Tennessee who had enlisted at the age of 20. He toured the Buchenwald camp a day or two after it was liberated, escorted by a Lithuanian inmate who spoke broken English. In an interview for a documentary film, Snodgrass recalled: "It was in the commander's office. There were lampshades made from the skin of Jews. In the crematorium they used the ashes of the inmates to fertilize the fields - the ashes of dead people. After an hour, it just became too much. I was stunned - just stunned. We don't even treat dogs like this."

The town of Weimar had suffered extensive damage after an Allied bombing raid on February 9, 1945. When the soldiers of the 80th Infantry Division arrived, the bodies of German civilians were still buried under the fallen buildings and the stench was unbearable. The classic building, where Germany's Weimar Republic was born, lay in ruins; the 18th century homes of Goethe and Schiller, both of which had been preserved as national shrines, were severely damaged. All the historic buildings on the north side of the main town square had been demolished, and the rest of the buildings were damaged.



Damage from Allied bombing of Weimar on Feb. 9, 1945

The American liberators had no sympathy for the residents of Weimar, who had let unspeakable atrocities happen at the Buchenwald camp, only five miles from the town. Regarding the complacency of the townspeople, Harry Snodgrass told an interviewer: "They saw the trains going in but no one saw them leave. If they say they didn't know what was happening, they were lying."

The Allies used the word "extermination camp" for all the Nazi camps, assuming that the purpose of these camps was the mass murder of the Jews. Buchenwald was a Class II camp, intended for the imprisonment of condemned criminals and captured anti-Fascist resistance fighters who were considered to be beyond "rehabilitation."

After crossing the Rhine river, Germany's ancient line of defense, on the night of March 22, 1945, the US Third Army, commanded by General George S. Patton, was advancing through the middle of Germany toward a pre-determined line where they would stop and wait for the Russian troops advancing from the east. In their path were four charming old towns laid out like a string of pearls in a straight line through the Horsel Valley on Highway F7: Eisenach, Gotha, Erfurt, and Weimar.

This was the heartland of German culture, the old stamping grounds of such German greats as Goethe, Schiller, Liszt, Herder, Nietzsche, Cranach, Luther, and Bach. Today these four cities draw millions of tourists who want to follow in the footsteps of the famous on "the Classics Road." The area has long been known for its well preserved medieval villages and its *gemütliche* German people.

By April 1st, which was Easter Sunday, the American soldiers were approaching the first town, Eisenach, on the northwestern edge of the Thuringian Forest. Eisenach has been at the center of German culture since the Middle Ages; it is where Johann Sebastian Bach was born and the place where Martin Luther holed up in a castle to translate the Bible. A few miles down the road is the town of Erfurt, the place from which St. Boniface set out on his mission to convert the Germans to Christianity.

It was at Weimar that Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Germany's most famous writer, had lived from 1775 until his death in 1832. The area where this barbaric camp now stood had been his favorite forest retreat, where he had sat under an oak tree. When a spot in the forest on the Ettersberg was cleared for the Buchenwald camp, Goethe's oak was left standing, and when the tree was killed in an Allied bombing raid on the camp on August 24, 1944, the Nazis cut it down but carefully preserved the stump.



Goethe's Oak in Buchenwald



The stump of Goethe Eiche (Goethe's Oak) at Buchenwald

Weimar was also the last residence of Friedrich von Schiller, a writer whose patriotism and nationalism had encouraged the unification of Germany in 1871. The famous composers, Franz Liszt and Johann Sebastian Bach, had both lived for a time in Weimar, and the famous philosopher, Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, had spent his last days there. Germany had long been recognized as the most cultured country in the Western world, as well as the most technically advanced.



Americans stacked German weapons at the gate house, April 1945

Block 61 at left, in Buchenwald, shortly after liberation by soldiers of U.S. Army 6<sup>th</sup> Armored Division.



Soon after liberation, camp survivors from Buchenwald's "Children's Block 66" – a special barracks for children. Germany after April 11, 1945 – Federation Nationale des Desportes et Intermedes Resistants et Patriotes



In this photo, taken by soldiers on April 16, 1945, after the liberation of Buchenwald, Elie Wiesel looks out from the far right of the middle bunk.

Rats, lice and other vermin were rampant. Deadly outbreaks of dysentery, typhus, tuberculosis and malaria wiped out entire sections of this camp. Inmates wore thin cotton uniforms year round, even in the harshest winter. Given only meager rations of stale bread and meatless soup, many starved to death. For prisoners not sentenced to die in the gas chambers, the average life span was barely four months.

## Chapter Seventy

As Gerda Weissman detailed in her excellent book, "All But My Life", the last day of November 1944 all the in the milling factory were called out one by one after hours of standing in the factory courtyard as SS women took over their factory. All in turn were ordered to undress and marched into a large room to stand naked with SS officers and women at a long table staring at them. Each was given a number.

Rumors circulated that they were being picked to provide comfort to wounded German soldiers. Gerda used her mother's precious pearl and diamond pendant she had sewn into her coat to keep all this time to barter with another girl for two small packets of poison to use in case the rumor was true. The SS women counted them each morning until the roll calls lasted for hours. Sirens began to sound on some days.

Christmas came and went with no Christmas spirit. Into January 1945, a day after the electricity went off, they were given orders to gather all their belongings. It was snowing heavily as they joined another groups of girls who already been walking for five days. This other group of girls thought they all were being marched to Oranienburg, another death camp like Auschwitz, to be gassed.

Gerda kept feeling that they would live to be liberated. She said to her friend Suse, "...I cannot explain, but I know somehow that we will be liberated." Her friend Suse said, "I feel that I will not be." Liesel, Gerda, Suse, and Ilse huddled together at dawn as each was given three pieces of bread and all the group of one thousand in Gerda's group marched out into the bright snow to begin their trek to where they knew not. Four thousand girls formed two long groups of haggard, freezing, starving young women. Many of the group that had already been marching for five days were barefoot and left blood trails in the snow. SS men armed with rifles walked at intervals of thirty feet with the SS women walking alongside carrying whips.

It grew colder toward evening as they were ordered into a huge barn on the side of the road. At dawn they were herded out and counted and recounted. One girl was missing and those around her were beaten, but wouldn't tell anything about her.

They marched many miles that day, often plowing through untouched snow, with any lagging behind being beaten by the SS with their rifle butts. At a midday pause two girls refused to go further. As the rest marched away Gerda heard two shots ring out.

The next day they marched westward and it was the last day they had bread. The guards stopped counting as they couldn't keep track of those who died or were shot. That night they rested in icy barns, hungry, afraid. On the fourth day they heard artillery fire. It was rumored that the Russians were very close.

Gerda heard two SS men discussing the destruction of the railroad the group of girls were to have boarded to go to be exterminated. Instead they would walk to their deaths.

They walked for a long time that evening, passing through small villages with smoke coming out the chimneys and people visible through the windows, fixing supper, snug and warm. They were ordered to lay down on the frozen ground in front of a large church at a town they came to as the snow covered them. They did their best to not allow any to go to sleep, for surely they would die. However, when dawn finally broke there were a number of girls that would never move again.

Late that next afternoon they came to Camp Christianstadt. There they were given two meals a day for three days and no roll call. Then they marched west again with roads full of people, all moving in the same direction, away from the Russian advance, hearing the firing of artillery behind them.

Some girls escaped to be taken in by peasants in the area but others were found and shot. Gerda and Ilse started planning to escape, but Ilse at the last minute started to panic. As they still stood ready to do so, screams and frightened begging could be heard from the woods. Three SS men had rounded up fourteen girls from the forest around them. They were lined up in front of the whole group, and one by one executed on the spot by the SS commandant with his pistol as their bodies fell upon each other.

Weeks seemed to pass as they continued through the bitter cold, sleeping in frigid barns and one night in a bombed out church as they listened to artillery fire from both east and west. Hundreds of girls had frozen feet, bloody and full of pus. One girl was seen breaking off her toes as if they were brittle wood. As the march continued one girl saw a milk can leaning against a tree and rushed to see if there were any milk in it. The SS guard ignored her pleas, grabbed her by her neck, forcing her to her knees, and shot her as she threw her arms up in a cry for mercy.

Gerda's group was down to one quarter of what they started with some two hundred and fifty kilometers since Grunberg as they neared Dresden, Germany. The whole group was ordered out on a bridge over the Elbe river as the SS watched them from the bank. Sirens started going off as giant bombers roared over them. It was as if the world was coming to an end. Heaven and earth shook, houses collapsed as Dresden was being destroyed.

The weather had turned milder as they marched on. Passing through Freiberg a window in a pretty house was open and they could hear the soft music of a piano floating on the air. Gerda looked over to see Ilse, who was such a good player and loved to play the piano, silently crying.

They marched on and on through bomb damaged cities as the weather turned stormy and snow fell constantly. They had been marching for two months and were now five hundred kilometers from Grunberg, two hundred and fifty from Dresden. Perhaps no more than four hundred girls left in Gerda's group now in the latter half of March.

They were put into an empty barracks with a dirt floor, ordered to undress down to their shoes and given odd assortments of clothing dipped in a solution to kill vermin while the clothes they had been wearing were taken away. The camp was surrounded by a fence topped with electrified wire with snow covered plains all around and no villages or houses. They all had diarrhea, with one wooden barrel near the door for four hundred girls, told the barrel must not overflow. The SS women in the morning beat them, calling them filthy names.

Some mornings as they stood at attention waiting for the yellow, tasteless liquid called "coffee", girls would die, some muttering words as they sank down, most just fell silently to the frozen ground. Then a creaking wheelbarrel would come take the bodies away.



At night they slept on the dirt ground in the barracks without bunks or blankets, shivering, huddled together for whatever warmth they could muster. A girl Gerda had talked to the night before she found lying face down in the mud the next morning, dead. Soon they marched away from Helmbrechts in the rain, sleeping outside that night in deep cold, with many stiff bodies on the ground at dawn.

Ilse was too weak to walk and was put in the wagon for the sick and dead that followed the group. When there were enough the dead would be unloaded and the sick shot.

They crossed the Czech frontier and the people threw them all kinds of food, ignoring the curses and shouting of the SS guards. An egg fell into the wagon and Gerda and Ilse drink it all up. But when Gerda went to relieve herself that night in an orchard they had stopped near, Ilse had fallen asleep and the bread they had was stolen. Gerda fussed at her as that could mean their lives. Ilse said, "Sorry, sorry, sorry". Days continued, filthy and stinking, they rode through the beautiful Czech countryside, now full of spring sunshine. They rode in the wagon but were not taken out and shot.

But at the end of the day Gerda was driven from the wagon by a guard. Stronger girls were called to lift out the dead and sick. Roll call occurred but Ilse wasn't to be found until Gerda saw some other girls dragging Ilse's coat away from a pile of four bodies. Gerda grabbed Ilse's coat back and put it around her. A girl named Hanka helped carry Ilse away from the other bodies and they lay down and Gerda held Ilse in her arms. Liesel brought two potatoes. Ilse said she didn't want it and insisted, so Gerda ate the one they had. A fine drizzle was falling. Ilse asked for water. Gerda started for a nearby brook when an SS man kicked at her with his boots. Ilse heard the heavy steps of the SS man's boots, saying, "They are coming, our saviors!"

"What do you want, you bitch?" The SS man demanded.

"Water," Ilse whispered. He kicked her and Gerda then flung herself across Ilse's body to shield her.

Ilse implored Gerda, "If my parents survived, don't tell them I died like this." She made Gerda promise that Gerda would go on for one more week without giving in. Then she said, "I hope nobody is angry at me. I am angry at no one." She told Gerda, "Thank you for everything!"

And after Gerda caught some rain drops for Ilse to lick off her hands Ilse whispered, "Hold my hand." They both fell asleep with the rain now stopped. Gerda woke with the dawning light. Ilse's hand was cold. She was dead. Some other girls buried her in the woods. Back in the wagon, Gerda took the chance to ride and not walk that day. As they passed through a little town a piece of bread fell into her lap and she shared it equally with twelve outstretched hands begging for a piece.

Allied planes were constantly overhead and their column got strafed, with the SS guards making this look like some type of military formation. Liesel had been wounded in the leg but said it didn't hurt.

Hanka wouldn't let Gerda ride in the wagon again for fear of her safety. Another cold night was spent in a barn as the next morning fifty girls didn't move.

From hearing the guards talking excitedly they found Hitler was dead. Now fear hit them that they would all be gunned down. But on the third evening after Ilse's death they came to Volary, and ordered to stand in a row in a meadow. Those not deemed fit were to stand apart. Gerda, though swaying, managed to hide behind others with Hanka's help after being ordered out by the woman SS guard. A truck pulled up and was jammed with girls and roared off. It failed to return. They were led to a large factory with the doors and windows barricaded.

It turns out the truck with the girls had been strafed by an American plane with the woman guard killed. The male guard shot a number of the girls while the rest ran away.

After a while they determined their guards had gone away, but they heard ticking. The guards had left a bomb to blow them all up. After all they had gone through not they were not to survive.

Some Czech men then broke the door in and told them to run, that the SS men were coming back to shoot them all as the bomb hadn't gone off. Those who could ran, but Gerda and two other girls hid in a large metal cylinder. In time they heard shouting in German, "Out you beasts, out!" Then firing as bullets went through the building and the cylinder, grazing Gerda and another girl in the shoulder.

Much later they heard shouting in Czech, "If someone is inside, come out, the war is over!" The man pointed through the window to a white flag waving peacefully from a church steeple, as Gerda's tears fell in the dust of the window sill.

They went back to the huge hall where most of the rest of the girls were shouting and crying with joy. Liesel was lying on the floor, telling Gerda Suse went looking for water.

Gerda found her a way off lying in the mud. "Suse, we are free!" Gerda called. When she touched her she realized Suse was dead.

In the afternoon a strange vehicle drove up with the town's mayor. It was an American Army jeep. One of the soldiers spoke German. As soon as the soldiers spoke to each other Gerda knew they were Americans, as her brother Arthur had spoken English a little. Tears welled up in her eyes as they approached.

The German speaking soldier patted Gerda with a clean hand, saying with compassion, "Don't cry my child. It's all over now." Asking if the group of girls could wait until the morning as they had to return to headquarters. She woke up the next morning in the austere hall wrapped warmly in a large SS coat.

She walked outside, her skin hot and dry. The first thing she saw was the strange vehicle bouncing toward them in the brilliant May sunshine. A different soldier sat in the left seat. She was overcome with joy. She hollered to the other girls the Americans were coming.

The soldier motioned for the driver to stop across from her. He got out and walked toward her, suddenly to her the embodiment of all heroism and liberty, greeting her. He looked to her like a young god. She resolved that he should have no illusions of who they were, after six long years of the Nazis trying to demean them.

"May I see the other ladies?" Ladies! Her brain couldn't believe it. He probably doesn't know, she thought.

"We are Jews." She said in a small voice.

In an interview years later, Gerda said it seemed a long moment as he looked down at her from his being taller than her before he spoke, and in his voice there seemed a catch, "So am I."

"Won't you come with me?" He held the door open for her. She at first didn't understand until she realized he wanted her to feel he didn't see the dirt, lice or emaciated state she was in but was seeing a lady. She would be forever grateful.

"I want you to see a friend of mine." Gerda said, and took him to Lilli on the way to see Liesel. Lilli lay covered in rags on the floor. Her eyes were enormous and her face lit up with a strange fire. She said something to the American officer in English as he bent down closer to answer her. Her hands shook as she gently touched the sleeve of his jacket.

Gerda made out the word Lilli said, "Happy". Then sighed as she released his hand and said, "Too late."

They moved to Liesel, but she just smiled and said nothing. Gerda looked back at Lilli, her eyes fixed on the American. A tear ran down her cheek and she died soon after.

Other soldiers were coming in and the American starting shouting commands to them in English, furious things weren't moving fast enough. He explained to Gerda in excellent German that a hospital was being set up for all of them.

Then he asked if he could do anything for Gerda, who requested he write to her uncle in Turkey for any news of her family, her mother, father, and brother Arthur.

Then he gently asked if they had been sterilized. But Gerda said, "We were spared." He drove off. She didn't get his name!

Within an hour Red Cross trucks arrived. Litter bearers gently but swiftly loaded the ill. Other soldiers carried girls in their arms like babies, talking soothingly to them in words the

girls didn't understand but the gestures of warmth and help were unmistakable. In a trance Gerda walked to a waiting truck and got on. On the soldier's sleeves was the red diamond of the U.S. Fifth Infantry Division. Their language, kindness and concern made it true: they were finally free!

At the converted school, wounded German soldiers were moved to the third floor and the girls were all installed on the first two floors. In one day the world had changed.

Huge caldrons of water were heated and Gerda was given a warm, luxuriating bath with a nurse scrubbing her all over with real soap. A peasant girl came in and gathered up Gerda's clothes in a basket. "They will be burned." She answered to Gerda's questioning glance. She was dried and a clean man's shirt was pulled over her with a blanket thrown over her shoulders as she was led to a bunk with fresh, white sheets. A nurse brought her a large drink of milk!

As Gerda drank it something tremendous and uncontrollable broke within her. A nurse hurried up, then a doctor. "No, let her cry it out," he said. She cried for Ilse, Suse, for her other friends, and for her family, who she knew were now dead, seeing them again in a joyous reunion had been keeping her going till now.

A night passed. She woke with a nurse bringing a full breakfast tray. As she lay daydreaming after eating a commotion broke out. "Germany has capitulated!" They told them. "The war in Europe is over!" An American doctor told her it was May 8, her birthday! In celebration he handed her a piece of chocolate, "Happy Birthday!" He told her.

The next days were a blur. Doctors and nurses spent much time with her. Her body was rubbed twice a day with oil because her skin was dry and parched. She was given injections and medications continuously. Gerda weighed sixty eight pounds.

The American officer who had greeted her before brought her some magazines and they talked. He had to leave and again she forgot to ask his name! But he came back in a few days and they talked. He spoke German so well because he was born in Germany. He, his brother and sister had made it to America after Hitler came to power. Their parents stayed, hoping the Nazi regime would collapse. But with all their efforts they couldn't get their parents out, who were deported to Camp de Gurs, in south of France.

She found out his name was Kurt Klein. She had been worried that in the last few days of the war something might have happened to him in fighting before the final surrender.

It turned out a lot of German Jewish young men served in the U.S. Army. There were thousands that escaped the Nazis and made their way to America. Almost to a man, they volunteered for the U.S. Army to go back and fight the Nazis destroying their homeland. There was also native Polish, French, and Italian boys in the group. The Army found out about this terrific resource and put thousands of them through special POW interrogation intelligence training in Ft. Richie, Maryland. They became known as the Richie Boys. The day after D-Day they were right behind the front lines interrogating newly captured German POWs for highly valuable military intelligence on German units, troop movements, weapons, morale, and personnel. They saved countless lives and greatly helped the whole Allied war effort. One U.S. official said they contributed up to 60% of the actionable intelligence on the front lines.

Some Richie Boys in Normandy, when they encountered a radical Nazi who wouldn't divulge anything, would have their partner dress up as a Soviet Army officer and would bring the "Soviet officer" in, threatening to turn the German over to the Soviet Army's loving arms. Almost every time the Nazi soon caved in. Kurt wasn't a Richie Boy but was a lieutenant in the Fifth Infantry Division.

Gerda was terribly sick with a fever for a week. She went through typhus and pneumonia. Kurt kept coming by. The other girls started kidding her about Gerda's lieutenant. After being released from the hospital, she tried going to her home in Belitz but even with traveling as far as Munich, decided not to go all the way home until she knew her parents would be there. Really knowing they would not. She kept going to a place in Munich where people left notes about loved ones to contact them if they saw the notes. She never

heard from her family. Kurt had managed to get her and a friend a place to stay in Munich and she got a job. She and Kurt had grown very close, but he then told her he was being sent back to America. She forced out a "I'm so glad for you!" She was shy and unsure to reveal about how much she cared for him.

With that, he asked "Is that all you have to say?". He told her he wanted her to come to America and be his wife. Gerda Weissman Klein lived in Buffalo, New York and then later in Arizona and had three children and eight grandchildren. She became involved with Jewish charities and with organizations that would help all children. She was invited in 1946 to tell her story in the Holocaust and continued to do so in the years to come.

The girl who had failed her tuberculosis test in Gruenberg at the weaving factory, both she and Gerda crying as the girl was taken away, told about on page 189, was sent to Auschwitz, arriving there to be exterminated. Sometime later, while working in Munich, before going to America, while looking at the lists of refugees while at the German Museum, Gerda heard a gay voice call her name. "Isn't that Gerda? It's me, not my ghost." said a rosy girl in a blue sweater. At Auschwitz the gas chambers were so busy this girl's group had to wait for death. As she sat on the ground she idly dug into the clay soil she was soon to become a part of. She unearthed a handful of gems some soul had buried there. With nothing to lose, she rushed up to an SS guard with the gems. "I want to live!" She pleaded, offering him the gems. He got her and two other girls from her group work in the kitchen and they survived Auschwitz. The guard could have kept the gems and let them die, but he didn't. After liberation she got checked out on her tuberculosis and was found to not have it. The test at Gruenberg must have been a mistake. Through a miracle, Providence, the girl had been given back her life and saved the lives of two others.

Gerda said in her book, "Coming to America was like stepping out of a dark, oppressive room in which I had been locked up for a long, long, time. Once I was free and exposed to light, the most ordinary objects, the simplest things acquired an aura of extraordinary beauty, desirability, and value. I reveled in the joy of discovery, and my gratitude was boundless."

One U.S. Army soldier, Norman Fellman of the 70<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, was captured in the last months of the war and with his fellow soldiers had been taken to a POW camp while crammed into rail cars used to carry horses, for several days without food or water. When men died on the way they continued standing as there was no room for them otherwise.

At the POW camp the Germans separated out 352 Jewish and Catholic POWs and sent them to a sub camp of Buchenwald concentration camp called Berga-Elster, in contravening the provisions of the Third Geneva Convention and the Hague Treaties. They were tasked to dig tunnels round the clock shifts into a mountain on starvation rations, approximately 400 calories a day. Many of his fellow soldiers died due to starvation and sickness including pulmonary disease due to dust inhalation from tunneling with explosives. They were to provide brown coal for transforming into usable fuel for the German war machine, and for ammunition bunkers. It was also for the purpose of annihilation through labor in digging the 17 tunnels, some as deep as 150 feet below ground. They were beaten on the slightest pretext. Norman said the only way he could make it was to concentrate on making the next few minutes at a time.

On April 4, to avoid the American Army the 300 surviving POWs were marched 125 miles through the cold, with 47 of them dying on the march. The Germans in such camps had been given a directive by Hitler that before they were overrun by the Soviets or Americans they were to kill all their prisoners. Thank God the guards ignored this.

The POWs were left in a barn when the German guards fled before the American Army coming over a hill. They looked out and saw a white star on the tanks. They were free! A fellow POW, Edward Slotkin, said a tank crewman easily pulled him up on the tank he was so light. Berga was run by a fanatical German national guard sergeant named Erwin Metz, who was responsible for the inhumane conditions and was given the order to take the prisoners on the death march. He escaped, was caught, and sentenced to death because

he had killed U.S. PVT Morton Goldstein of the 106<sup>th</sup> US Division. His sentence was commuted to twenty years in prison in exchange for intelligence the U.S. believed could be used against the emerging Soviet threat. He only served nine and lived out his life as a free man in Germany. The U.S. Army never formally acknowledged the terrible treatment of these American Prisoners of War.

Norman was down to eighty six pounds. When he first went overseas he weighed 178. They were taken right away to an American hospital in Paris that had been set up in a school. While lying in clean sheets a woman came up to him, "What food would you like?" She asked.

"Eggs," he replied. She asked how he would like them. "Any way you can fix them." He replied. She brought back twelve eggs fixed six different ways.

On 20 April 1945, Hitler's 56th birthday, Soviet artillery of the 1st Belorussian Front began shelling Berlin and did not stop until the city surrendered. The weight of ordnance delivered by Soviet artillery during the battle was greater than the total tonnage dropped by Western Allied bombers on the city during the course of the war. Earlier General Eisenhower had ordered General Bradley to work up an estimate of the number of American casualties that would incur in the taking of Berlin. The estimate came up to 100,000 dead and wounded. Personally I'm glad that Pop and the American Army didn't have to go take that city. If they had I might not be here. That turned out to be about the same number of Soviet Army casualties in taking the city. There were also 300,000 Berlin citizen and German Army deaths that occurred during that battle. A lot of Germans committed suicide, including whole families. It was also estimated that 5000 German women had been raped as the Soviet army penetrated into Berlin. The real figure is probably considerably higher. Many of the women were also mutilated and killed after being raped.

Right after the end of the war, Reichmarshall Herman Goering, head of Nazi Germany's Luftwaffe, in talking to General Spaatz of the USAAF, said "When I saw your bombers over Berlin protected by your long-range fighters, I knew then that the Luftwaffe would be unable to stop your bombers. Our weapons plants would be destroyed; our defeat was inevitable." The long-range fighters he was referring to were the American P-51 Mustangs.

Mustang pilots shot down a total of 4,950 enemy aircraft during World War II. A total of 251 pilots achieved 'ace' status, with an average rate of 7.69 aircraft shot down per 'ace'. There were 16,776 P-51s produced over a five-year span (1940-1945). That's roughly 350 planes per month.

Adolph Eichmann, the Nazi officer in charge of making sure of the transport of millions of victims to the death camps, escaped from U.S. custody after the war and, with the help of Catholic Church officials, succeeded in fleeing to Argentina. There in 1960 he was captured by the Israeli Security Service (Mossad), smuggled out, and brought to Israel for trial. He was found guilty of crimes against the Jewish people and hanged at midnight May 31, 1962. His ashes were dumped in the sea beyond Israeli boundary waters.

After the war, some of those responsible for crimes committed during the Holocaust were brought to trial at Nuremberg, Germany, taking place in 1945 and 46. Two other trials were held at other locations. Judges from the Allied powers, Great Britain, France, the Soviet Union and the United States presided over the hearings of twenty-two major Nazi criminals.

Twelve prominent Nazis were sentenced to death. Others who played key roles in the Holocaust, including high-level government officials, and business executives who used concentration camp inmates as forced laborers, received short prison sentences or no penalty at all. Many emigrated to the U.S. Others that were sought for their crimes mostly escaped to South America through a network that came to be known as the "ratline".

## Chapter Seventy One

The 38<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> Combat Teams began a movement to Bavaria as the V Corps takes up a position on the right flank of the First Army. Pop and B Company continued as part of the 23<sup>rd</sup> CT.

The current indication was that the Division would stay in the Mulde River defensive positions until the fast collapsing Nazis called it quits. But the Division was transferred from the First to the Third Army and a swift motor trip carried it 200 miles South to an area along the Czechoslovakian border.



The initial Russo-American link-up was made at Torgau, Germany. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Combat Battalion, with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, moved 240 miles by motor, on May 1-2, along the Autobahn to take up a position in eastern Bavaria, in the vicinity of Cham.

Here at top, General Hodges, 1st Army Commander, meets the Soviet Army Commander.

Lt. Col. Snetzer and Capt. Fred Valentino of the Engineer Battalion drove into Chemnitz but were stopped by the front line of the U.S. 76<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division as the town wasn't cleared yet. They drove on an autobahn for the first time 150 miles to Bayreuth. They saw convoys from V Corps units and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division all rolling along the wide open highway with no intersections and no interference from the Germans.

On May 2 snow was on the ground. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division units sped along the splendid highway through mountains and valleys of pine forested Bavaria, reaching Ober Vietach, the location of the Division's new CP, 240 miles from the previous one. The Engineer Bn CP was set up in Treunz in a little mansion on a high hill.

Lt. Col. Snetzer's diary from May 2, "Great news today, all German Armies in Italy surrendered unconditionally at noon today and Russians announced complete fall of Berlin and rumors persist of death of Hitler and Gobbels."

When the Russian soldiers started moving into Germany itself and the towns approaching Berlin, they encountered beautiful houses, with curtained windows, fine china and silverware, neat, large, well kept farms and prosperous looking towns and villages everywhere. Many of Soviet soldiers had been raised in mud type huts with straw roofs. They couldn't imagine why the Germans had wanted to attack them.

On May 3 the Battalion moved to Schonthal with the Division moving to Rotz the next day. Pop and B Company had moved into Bohemia. There was news of big victories as reports came in of a mass surrender in a North Germany pocket with link up of British and Russians.

On May 4 the entire 11<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division in total surrendered to the 90<sup>th</sup> Division the 2<sup>nd</sup> Div. had just relieved. Major General Wendt Weitersherm, the German General surrendered in a ceremony just over the border of Czechoslovakia at Vseruby. Long columns of German tanks and trucks began moving through the 2nd Division to the Division rear. "Germans looked good in their very neat black and gray uniforms and ski boots. They unloaded their ammo and threw away their guns after passing thru our lines." Only one pocket in Czechoslovakia is left resisting in all of the war.

On May 5 the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division jumped off in attack participating with the Third Army at 1100 hours toward Pilsen, home of the Skoda Armament Works, in cold, miserable, rainy weather lasting all day. Three regiments abreast on an extreme wide front but only encounter a few scattered rifle men. The Bn. CP moved across border into town of Drazenov as the Division CP moved to Klice.

Facing the Division now was a motley group of Home Guard, service troops, and battle exhausted units of one time high quality branches of the Wehrmacht. When some of the Division units passed through the Sudetenland surly looks and sullen faces greeted them as Germans walked with eyes toward the ground, refusing to acknowledge the victors. When almost at once the same Division units would pass into Czechoslovakia people welcomed them as liberators, the people almost hysterical with the joyous sense of true freedom after six years in the Nazi yoke. Czech villages burst out with red, white, and blue flags hoarded for this day and set up triumphal arches of greenery, decking armored cars with lilacs and turning out en masse to dance in the streets.

The XII Corps on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Div.'s right has the objective of Prague, Czechoslovakia. In the evening the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division entered the good size town of Domazlice, the first the 2<sup>nd</sup> has "liberated" since Belgium as all cities until Domazlice were German. The city's population stood on the streets cheering widely, a brass band played in the town square, flags of U.S., England, and Czech flew everywhere.

The people gave the U.S. soldiers wine, eggs, food, flowers, and Lt. Col. Snetzer said "some of the best beer ever. We had a big time being able to fraternize with these people. Visited PW hospital where all Ruskis and French... Heard rumor enemy opposite us was surrendering but appears that everyone in all Europe but Army group opposite us has quit, so we continue attack in the morning."



On May 6 the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division proceeded with the attack, taking thousands of prisoners as the people in the liberated cities stand, cheer, and wave the U.S. soldiers madly on. The people are wild with joy as they begin realizing for sure the wonderful news they are truly free after six years under the brutal jack boot of the Nazis.



German Prisoners of War.  
Bottom left: waiting in field to be processed. Bottom right: marching into captivity. Top right: Being processed. Top left: on U.S. trucks getting ready to help clear the streets and repair the city of Pilsen under the direction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion where several thousand Nazi POWs also began rebuilding the bomb damaged rail lines.



General Robertson decorates General Salvan, CG of Soviet 5<sup>th</sup> Tank Corps, with Legion of Merit. On Right:

Ceremony in main square of Pilsen, at which Soviet and American forces exchanged decorations. Flag on left is the National Colors of the Soviet Union.

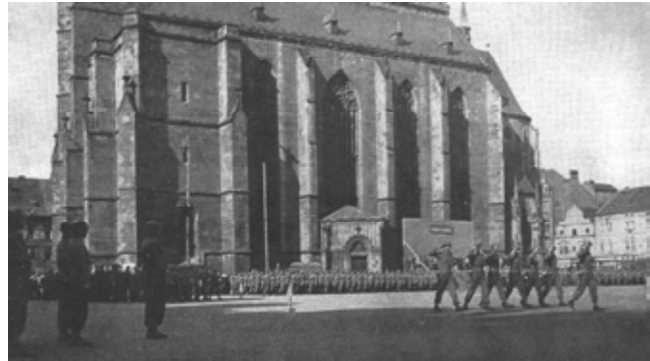
One American division was moving into the interior of Germany on one of the broad autobahn highways. Mile after mile of tanks, jeeps, armored personnel carriers, trucks, tank destroyers, and towed artillery passed by. As Stephen Ambrose reported in his book, "Citizen Soldiers"; there were two older German women up on a hill overlooking the auto traffic of massive American military might. One turned to the other woman and said, "How could we have hoped to defeat such a people?"

V-E and the wildly enthusiastic ovation given the Division by the happy Czechs made a tremendous climax for the war in Europe. On the approach to Pilsen and in the city itself the correspondents said the demonstration of gratitude was even greater than that of Paris.

The Bn. CP is moved to the town of Stod. On early morning of May 7 the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion entered Pilsen. From Col. Snetzer's diary, "All was festive and celebration. People lined streets all day and waved flags, threw flowers and cheered every vehicle that passed. In evening they had a big parade thru the streets of Pilsen as Czech Brigade drove thru streets."



Czech people cheering wildly during a parade for the liberators, and cheering for their own liberation.



On Left: Czechs throng the main square of Pilzen to hear a concert by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division Band the Sunday after V-E Day. Right: Many Battalion parades were held in the Pilzen Public Square.

"Bn. C.P. moved into a most elegant castle on outskirts of Pilsen which had been used as Headquarters for all German Flak installations protecting the Skoda Works here. It is an elegant CP."

"Heard tonight that war is over and that we will not advance any further from here. V.E. day to be celebrated tomorrow. The big question now becomes when do we leave for the East."



Dad said they sat there on the banks of the river at Pilsen for quite a few days, waiting for the Soviet Army to come up to them.

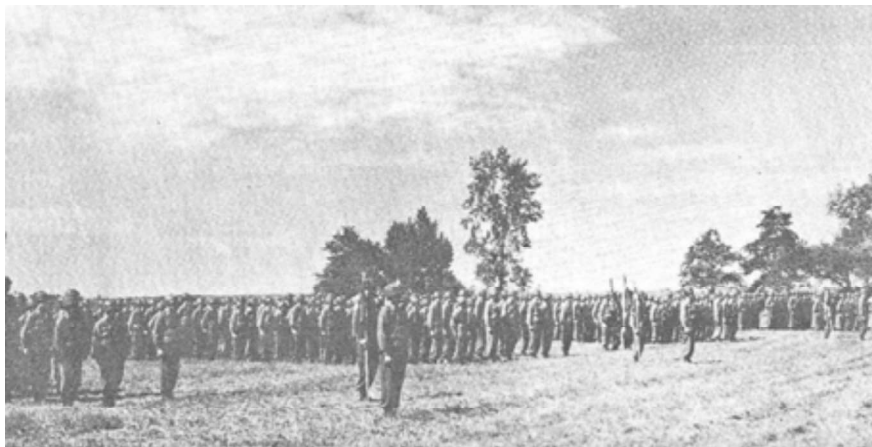
On May 8 VE Day is celebrated all over the world. A fine chicken dinner and beer was furnished to all the men. The 16<sup>th</sup> Armored Division moves out of Pilsen, and the gathering of thousands of surrendering prisoners continues.

Each of the white starred American vehicles that rolled into the city received a separate tremendous cheer. The crowds packing the sidewalk increased as the day continued. As the last troops arrived at nightfall the celebration even increased in intensity.

At the top a parade down a Pilsen street and dancing in the streets.

Pilsen's mayor, just released from a concentration camp and given his job back, brought the traditional Czechoslovakian welcome of bread and salt to General Robertson, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's commander, and some of the country's finest musicians, allowed to play only certain compositions under the Nazi regime, held an open concert for the American commander.

Dances and parties were held for the doughboys by the Division, and numerous tours were taken of the very fine breweries in Pilsen, but the question in most of their minds was whether this marked the end of the war for them, or whether they were headed to begin another campaign in the Pacific. For the civilians of Pilsen, the war was over, but for the Americans, it was a different story.



On 30 May 1945, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Combat Battalion held a Memorial Day Service in the shadows of the smokestacks of the Skoda Armament Works of Pilsen.

Sgt. Harley Reynolds, from St. Charles, Virginia, with the First Infantry Division, had been in combat in North Africa, Sicily, and from D-Day at Bloody Omaha Beach through combat into Belgium and into Germany. He was wounded in France, and after taking ill just into Germany was transferred to England to train troops for badly needed replacements in combat units on the front lines.

He had badgered his father into signing his enlistment papers in 1940 that he was eighteen, while he was only sixteen. He had three younger sisters. He had the most points after serving for three years in heavy combat for any single man in England, so he was sent home as soon as the war in Europe ended. He and 17 others were sent back to the States to test the mustering out procedures. He got off the train in St. Charles, and started walking home, just east of town. He crested the rise of the road above his home. He saw one of his sisters sitting on the porch. She let out a scream he said, "I can still hear to this day." Then she hollered, "Harley's home!" His whole family came piling out and up the hill to swarm him. His father was the last to come up. He took his hand and said, "Welcome home son, maybe now we can get a good night's sleep."

His book, "How I survived the THREE FIRST WAVE INVASIONS, North Africa-Sicily-Omaha Beach" is excellent reading.

A boy from Shawnee Prairie in East Texas where Dad also grew up, Carl Havard, had gone through the war in Europe as a tank driver with Patton's Fourth Armored Division. They had spearheaded many an assault on the Germans. Carl had always wanted to see Berlin. When V-E Day arrived Carl's lieutenant said, "Havard, you're always talking about wanting to

see Berlin, well, now's your chance. You see that duce and a half? Take it and whoever else wants to go and you can go see Berlin." So Carl and a bunch of his unit's soldiers piled into the truck and took off and toured Berlin. There wasn't all that much left to see except bombed out shells of buildings and people wandering around looking lost. American bombing and the Soviet Army's fight for the German capital had decimated the city. They did manage to find an important looking building that was relatively unscathed and entered it. When they came to an imposing looking door, a man who seemed to be in charge there said they could look in but not enter. So they looked in and saw a large room filled all around almost up to the ceiling with neatly stacked U.S. dollars of various denominations. They didn't know if these were counterfeit bills but looked on in wonder.

Little known is that 5,000 Jews had been in hiding right in the Nazi center of Berlin all during the war. It was estimated by historians that as many as 50,000 Germans, or ten for every one Jew harbored, had to have known about these Jews in order to support them and keep them alive.

Also, of the five million Soviet soldiers who had been captured when Germany invaded the Soviet Union, most being captured in the first year, only two and a half million returned home alive. Most were murdered outright after capture or were murdered in the death camps. Some sources put the Soviet soldiers as high as 3.5 million killed while in Nazi captivity.

The numbers of Soviet killed by the Soviet government in the vast Gulag Archipelago from 1917 to 1953 has been put at figures of tens of millions. The Soviet military during the war suffered 9 million dead, 10 million wounded, 3 million permanently handicapped, with 20 million civilians killed. One historical source estimated as many as 40 million Soviet people died in the war both military and civilian. This does not include those who died in the vast Soviet Gulag during the war.

As mentioned earlier, many young men's lives were spared with the U.S. Army not having to capture Berlin. The Second Infantry Division had spent 320 days in combat since coming ashore on D plus one, June 7, 1944. It remained in the line 71 straight days in Normandy. After taking over positions in Germany on October 4, it was committed continuously in combat for 217 days until the end of the war. The troops were tired and weary of war. Two enemies had been defeated, Germany and Italy, one still remained.

The Division's casualty figures for the 11 months of combat:

	Officers	EM	
Killed	165	2834	
Wounded	472	10452	The non-battle casualties were disease, accidents, battle fatigue, and severe trench foot.
Non-Battle	314	10291	
Missing		109	

Pop and B Company engineers, quickly after the celebrations, began working to get the city's plumbing working, the electricity consistent, roads cleared, buildings repaired, skilled civilians to work rebuilding their country. U.S. administrators worked restoring order to civilian management.

Every five years on May 6 for the next seven decades the small town of Pilsen held a city wide celebration they called the Liberation Celebration, marking the liberation of Pilsen by General George Patton's Third Army, which at that time included the Second Infantry Division. May 6, 2010 was the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pilsen's liberation. By the thousands they line the streets for miles cheering any American veteran and any American soldier that walked or rode on vintage jeeps and tanks in the day long parade. The American soldiers are asked for their autographs like rock stars.

One Czech girl, Zdenka Sladkova, was a 14 year old girl when Lt. Virgil P. Kirkham, the last recorded American USAAF pilot killed in Europe during WWII when his P-47 Thunderbolt crashed near Trhava, Czechoslovakia. It was 20 year old Lt. Kirkham's 82<sup>nd</sup> mission and was one he volunteered to go on. Zdenka was so moved by his sacrifice she made a vow to care for his memory by keeping his crash site and caring for a memorial for him near her home. At 81 years old she continues to do so.

Pop, because of all his points he had built up for days in combat, awards, and time in Europe, got orders to go home. He made his way by train through various train depots and countries to LaHavre, France on the channel coast. There he and many other troops caught a troop ship, the U.S.S. General Richardson. It was a cargo ship made up for carrying a large number of soldiers.

George Cooper, raised on a dairy farm in the Alvin, Texas area south of Houston, had been on a mortar squad with the 76<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division all through the European theater. V-E Day and the hostilities were over. He and two buddies got leave to visit England before going home. They took a train out of London to see some of the country, not sure where they were going, just wanted to go.

About an hour west of London they got off to look at a pleasant little town to look around and missed their train. Someone in the town found out about them, about three American soldiers just back from the fighting. Soon the whole town knew about them. They got invited to dinner. They got invited to dinner after dinner, to drinks at the pub, to dances, to dates every night. For over a week the whole town and all its people feted the three young Americans to the time of their lives. They weren't allowed to pay for anything. Finally they had to leave, very reluctantly, with goodbys ringing in their ears from a town, no doubt, who probably were missing their own boys, some of whom might not have ever returned, and to show their gratitude to America through these tall young men, (George was 6'4").

On the U.S.S. General Richardson Pop and all the troops on board were fed twice a day. Dad said it was by far the best food they had since leaving home. All they wanted, milk, real eggs, steak, vegetables, cooked with great taste and care. The ship didn't have to worry about getting sunk by torpedoes. The men didn't have to continually think about dodging shell fire and looking over their shoulders.



USS General W. P. Richardson (AP-118) docks at New York City, 7 June 1945, with returning GIs

Photograph provided by [www.navsourc.org](http://www.navsourc.org) archives

As Pop and his fellow soldiers pulled away they left behind many thousands of Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice for the freedom of others. The Normandy American Cemetery contained 9,386 American soldier's graves. It also contained 1,557 names on a Memorial of those who were killed but their bodies weren't found or couldn't be identified. 4,410 American soldiers were left buried at the Brittany American Cemetery in Brittany, France. Most of them had been killed in the vicious fighting around St. Lo. The Lorraine American Cemetery, outside of Saint-Avold, Moselle, France contains the bodies of 10,489 American soldiers killed in that area, mostly during the Battle of the Bulge and right afterward. Many other Americans were buried in other places. It could just as easily have been Pop and any of the soldiers serving with him, for quite a few of those men, it was.

They arrived at a port in New York and took trains to Texas to their post of Camp Swift, near Brenham, Texas, where the Second Infantry Division was to start training for leading the assault landings on Japan itself.

## Chapter Seventy Two

Mom had two brothers serving in the Pacific. The Pacific war was a series of brutal, violent, intense battles on land and sea whose land battles often lasted longer than the U.S. planners anticipated. The two major avenues of attack by the United States in retaking the whole Pacific from Japan were a southern sweep and a central campaign.

Uncle Charles, Mom's nearest in age, and just one year behind Pop at Texas A&M was a 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant in the U.S. Army's 503<sup>rd</sup> Parachute Regiment. A bunch of planes filled with him and his fellow paratroopers had been flying for two hours from an island in the Philippines when they got the word to hook up and shuffle to the door. They jumped out above Corregidor, The Rock, in Manila Bay, occupied by many soldiers of the Japanese Army. This had been the last stand of the American military in the Philippine Islands before being finally overrun by the Japanese in 1942. Uncle Charles and his 503<sup>rd</sup> Parachute Regiment jumped, landing on the 5 sq. mile Island's highest point, fought a sharp, vicious 10 day fight, and took Corregidor back from the Japanese. This enabled the U.S. Army under General MacArthur to use the harbor in Manila Bay to finish conquering the Japanese in the Philippines. Years later at some family get together I saw some pictures Uncle Charles had of Japanese soldiers on Corregidor lying about on the ground.

"What happened to them?" I asked.

"We killed 'em." He answered.

He also casually mentioned seeing a Japanese Kamazie plane smash into a ship traveling near the one he was being transported on to another operation.

Uncle Drummond, Mom's oldest brother, was a Marine on Iwo Jima. He was wounded in the battle, shot in the leg, and on a hospital ship when the flag was raised on Mount Suribachi.

In the Midwest an 8 year old boy, whose father was fighting with the Army on Iwo Jima, came home with his two siblings and mother from the store one afternoon while that battle was going on. He said he could tell even as a child how totally in love his parents were. When they arrived a telegraph messenger was waiting. His mother with stoic face told them to go into the house. She walked over to the messenger and later came in and quickly, silently got them supper and to bed. The boy said he could hear his mother start crying later in the night. He said it seemed she cried for years afterward. That was happening all over America, all over the world. That is one of the truest faces of war.

Uncle Charles was a lieutenant and platoon leader. After Corregidor they were in the Negros Islands fighting the Japanese for the islands. He was leading his platoon over a rise against the enemy when as they crested a small hill, a hidden Japanese machine gun opened up on them. Uncle Charles was hit with brutal force. The bullet went into the front of



his chin, through his jaw and center of his neck and out the back, miraculously leaving his spinal cord intact.

He always kept his radio man and his medic right near him. The platoon regressed back upon the hill. As soon as he was hit the platoon medic had popped him in both shoulders with morphine. Uncle Charles said he wasn't feeling any pain, though his jaw was flopping about as he gave orders. He got his platoon organized, they approached the hill crest, threw grenades down into the machine gun nest, these exploded, and the soldiers fired in the whole area to make sure the enemy were all killed.

Uncle Charles was feeling pretty good about it all. The little medic kept bugging him terribly though about Lt. Slover needing to get immediate, major medical aid. Uncle Charles kept telling the medic he felt fine. Finally the medic said, "Look Lieutenant, if you'll just go back to the aid station and let them look at you, I'll leave you alone." Uncle Charles thought that was reasonable and the medic would leave him alone. So he walked back to the aid station. As soon as they saw how severely wounded he was he was on his way to a hospital ship.

There his mouth and throat swelled so a tracheotomy had to be performed on him to enable him to breath. One of his fellow soldiers took the sword of the Japanese officer in charge of the unit that fired on him and carried it through the rest of the war to present to Uncle Charles when the man got back home. It is now on display in the Nmitz war museum in Fredericksburg, Texas. I always remembered the large scar across the middle back of his neck where the bullet came out and the scar on his throat where the tracheotomy had been performed.

Soon after that Mom and a group of her nurses had gone to a physic out of curiosity. Jo, Mom's roommate, had gone before Mother. Jo came out telling the rest of them that the woman knew everything about her!

Mom entered and saw down across from the woman. The woman looked at her for a bit before speaking. "I had trouble getting through to you." She finally said. She closed her eyes for a bit and then said, "You have two brothers in the war, and they are both wounded." She added quickly, "They will make it back alright." Mom said later that someone must have told the woman that she had two brothers and in war the woman could guess that both would probably have been wounded.

One of war wounded Mom cared for had been on an island in the Pacific outside at the back of a large hospital, recuperating with other wounded. The island had long been liberated from the Japanese. A thin, bedraggled, solitary Japanese soldier who had been hiding out in the jungle emerged out of the thick growth to turn himself in. When all the wounded Americans saw who it was they all gave chase in their wheelchairs and on crutches until the emaciated soldier was taken by the MPs.

When Uncle Charles arrived on the west coast on a hospital ship his jaw was wired shut. He had been living on soup taken up in a straw. He wired Mamaw Slover, his Mother, "Arrived only with pajamas. Send \$50." When the Army asked him where he would like to be sent, he said through wired teeth, "Anywhere in Texas." So they sent him to Ft. Bliss near El Paso. It was 767 miles from Lufkin.

At the end of the war mother told of caring for a soldier or airman who had been a German POW. His leg was so badly mangled in combat right before capture that it had to be amputated to prevent gangrene. She said the Germans were so short of medical supplies

they only had alcohol and water to work with, so the American had to be held down by several men while the doctor operated. During the operation the American passed out from the pain, but she said the German doctor did a beautiful job on the surgery.

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Eight year old Sigmund Junker started working in his family's Jewish bakery in Poland from 10 at night until 10 in the morning, making a wide variety of breads, rolls, pastries and more, all by hand. By age 13 he finished school and worked full time through his teenage years. Until 1939. "When the war broke out, everything was gone to hell. We got nothing left." When German forces occupied his neighborhood in 1939, Jucker and his brothers hid in the floor of the house for several months to avoid the capture of young Jewish men. He escaped to Russia where he worked in a coal mine, got sick, and then found a job in a bakery, living in poverty and sleeping on top of his employer's oven, mixing 1,100 kilos of dough three times a day by hand.

His mother sent a man to bring him home, luckily because that day in that city in the Soviet Union, the Germans had taken over the territory and all the Jews were rounded up by the Nazis for a mass killing.



Photo of Sigmund Jucker as a young man

After six weeks back home, two years since Germans first occupied their town, he his two brothers and sister were taken to hard labor camps. His parents were sent to Auschwitz to never return. Jucker bartered with a German soldiers to get his siblings into better camps.

"Whatever I went through, I never thought I would live to the next day," Jucker said, "But I lived through and I thank God I lived through all what I've seen in my eyes." He went to eight different labor camps, mixing cement by hand, taking apart houses, moving heavy furniture, all at "Fast walking! Walk fast!" "If you didn't you got a big stick over your head." And all for a piece of bread or a potato or maybe two a day. At one camp he was ten minutes late for roll call and the next morning was made to roll head to foot from one side of the camp to the other for an entire hour through the muddy water and mud, with the sound of Russian artillery just fifty kilometers away.

One of his brothers was nearly dead when he arrived at a labor camp called Klagenfurt. Jucker nursed him back to health by giving him most of his own food ration. After four and a half years they were freed by the Russians.

"One of them gave me so many boxes of sardine and meat, but I couldn't eat anything... My throat was closed for three days and three nights. I couldn't eat or drink just for nerves and to be free. Just because to be free. And nobody can imagine what that means to be free."

The three brothers and their sister reunited in a repatriation camp with 10,000 other people. Their sister met and married a man and headed to America. She wrote her brothers that "The streets were lined with gold." So they followed her to Houston in 1949, opening their Three Brothers Bakery, four years to the day May 8, 1949 when they were liberated; which became extremely successful with their children continuing in the business and expanding it to this day.



Sigmund, left, Sol, and Max at their bakery in Houston, Texas

## Chapter Seventy Three

At camp Swift Pop and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division started training for beach assault. The 2<sup>nd</sup> had been picked as the U.S. Army unit to make the initial assault on the beaches in the invasion of Japan itself. Their war wasn't over. It may never be over for a lot of them.

Intelligence estimates that there would be one million American dead and wounded in the invasion of the Japanese home islands. It was estimated there would be at least two million Japanese military casualties. Every aspect of Japanese society was being prepared for a national suicidal stand. The Japanese were training their school girls to fight on the beaches with sharpened bamboo staves. Thousands of Kamikaze pilots were being trained to slam into American ships.

American planners had seen Japanese fanaticism in the battle for Iwo Jima which lasted from February 19 – March 26, 1945. 22,000 Japanese troops defended the island with only 216 left alive at the end of the battle, most of these severely wounded. 6,825 Marines lost their lives with 21,084 wounded.

At Okinawa, from 100,000 to 120,000 Japanese soldiers were killed in that battle, with from an estimated 40,000 to 120,000 Japanese civilians killed, many committing suicide. The Americans lost a total of 12,520 killed, 4,900 of those sailors on ships that were hit by waves of Kamikaze planes. These suicide pilots sunk 36 U.S. ships and damaged 368. 36,480 American Marines and Soldiers were wounded. The battle lasted from April 1-June 22, 1945. Bloody back and forth vicious fighting occurred all over the large island.

Robert Powell, raised in Manning and Lufkin, Texas, whom Pop had attended several engineering classes with at Texas A&M before the war, was in the thick of the battle. One night in total darkness he heard a noise near him. Lying absolutely still, barely breathing, a Japanese soldier crawled right over him, apparently thinking Robert dead.

The American Sixth Army was to storm ashore with 650,000 men on November 1, 1945 in operation Olympic. Another major assault was scheduled for March 1, 1946 on another of the major Japanese islands. Pop and the Second Infantry Division were to be the first on the beach in the first assault. With the massive American air and naval bombardment and the still heavily armed Japanese frantically fighting for their homeland, casualties were expected to be horrendous on both sides. That was not counting Japanese civilian deaths and wounded.

U.S. President Truman and his administration studied Japan in light of the new weapon the United States now had in its arsenal. As Vice President under Franklin Roosevelt he hadn't been informed about the new weapons or their potential. Three years and two billion dollars and hundreds of thousands of workers at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, Hanford, Washington, and an elite crew of scientists at Los Alamos, New Mexico produced a uranium and a plutonium bomb.

The man in charge of it all was Major General Leslie Groves. He was an Army engineer who had been in charge of building the new U.S. Military headquarters at the start of war, the Pentagon. Which from start to finish was completed in 18 months.

President Truman was briefed on certain facts. There were still one million armed Japanese soldiers stationed in various places in Southeast Asia, including Manchuria in China and large areas of south-central China. Who was to say the Japanese military might not order them in some desperate move to kill any POWs they held and any civilians around them and then kill themselves. The U.S. had found out about an order issued to Japanese POW camp commanders, if they were about to lose control of their camp to Allied forces, were to kill all their POWs by any means possible.

The Soviets had now formally entered the war against the Japanese. Truman also had a big concern about the Soviet penchant for hegemony.

American submarines also had decimated Japanese shipping, especially those ships bringing food and raw materials to the Japanese home islands. 52% of all Japanese ships sunk in the war had been sunk by American subs. 52 American subs had been sunk in the fighting, with three of their commanders being awarded the Medal of Honor, two posthumously. American subs were now so hard up for targets they were targeting Japanese shore patrol boats. The country's agriculture was devastated by the war in general and American bombing. Food imports were almost at a standstill. It was estimated six to seven million Japanese civilians would starve to death if the war continued with an invasion of the Japanese home islands.

Mom really wanted to visit Dad at Camp Swift. He had made it through all the European combat. They had written all during the war and his time overseas. Things were getting serious between them, really serious. Mamaw Slover, Mom's Mom, who corresponded often during the war with Pop and the rest of the soldiers she knew, still said she couldn't go by herself though. Here, Mom had been an Army nurse, seen some of the worse what the war could do to young men, had treated them at all hours of the day and night, yet her Mom wanted her to be properly chaperoned. After all, she was going to an Army post. So Mom was allowed to go if her younger sister, Mary, a cheerleader while in college at Stephen F. Austin College and known to enjoy her times there, could accompany her as a chaperone.

Pop had made it home alive. They had both made it through the war. His soon to be wife, whom he had been writing all during the war, was with him now. They were totally in love. They had the promise of their whole wonderful lives ahead of them even with the current uncertainty. "Those were good times," Pop said.

The specter of war continued hanging over him and all the men of the Second Infantry Division. They were training for being the first to spearhead the assault on Japan. For the time being Mom and Dad tried putting all that in the back of their minds and enjoy the current joyous moments.

They attended a Texas AMC football game and Mom saw that a group of the war wounded she treated at Ft. Hood, Texas had been brought to the game and set up in chairs and lounges at the edge of the field. She and Pop stopped and greeted them. Mom said later when she was back on duty at the hospital the boys who saw them at the game would say, "Ahhh, Nurse Slover, you don't want to marry that old Army Major." Pop had been promoted.

While at Ft. Swift, Dad got a call from Sgt. Broadstreet, one of the regular Army sergeants in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion. Sgt. Broadstreet had been raised at 410 Matamoras street there in San Antonio, which he said was "the hell hole of San Antonio." It was on a

late Saturday night and the call was from San Antonio. Sgt. Broadstreet was in jail. He was sloppily pleading for his Major Poland to come rescue him.

Pop drove down to San Antonio to talk to the Military Police. The desk sergeant told Pop what a problem Sgt. Broadstreet had been to them, that they had seen him before. It had taken five MPs to subdue, corral, and get the good sergeant to the jail. Sgt. Broadstreet hated MPs for some reason, always had, especially when he was drunk, as he so was that night. Pop began relating to them about what all Sgt. Broadstreet had gone through, serving his country, withstanding terrible combat. They were pretty reluctant but gradually softened as Dad told more about the old regular Army 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt., and finally released him to Pop without charges, but with some choice words about what would happen if they ever ran across him like that again.

Mom said Pop had really gotten spoiled since he had been stationed at Ft. Swift. As an Army Major he had a young soldier, newly inducted into the Army, as a personal orderly. Anything Pop wanted done, all his clothes, keeping his quarters straightened, any errands, anything within the power of his rank, the orderly got done.

A B-29 bomber of the 509<sup>th</sup> Composite Group, the Enola Gay, named after the pilot, Col. Paul Tibbitts' Mother, took off from the island of Tinian at 2:45 a.m. on the morning of August 6, 1945. In its bomb bay lay a uranium 235 bomb called Little Boy. Two other B-29s accompanied the Enola Gay at a distance as wingman observers, and five and a half hours later the people of Hiroshima noticed a silver plane high in the sky release something that shined in the morning sun. In 53 seconds their world and the world at large changed forever.

The Japanese war time government still remained defiant with talk of sacrifice for the Emperor and the Empire of Japan. Three days later Fat Man, a plutonium bomb was dropped on a secondary target, Nagasaki by a B-29 named Box Car. The first target had been obscured by clouds. Though Fat Man was dropped way off target, its power still devastated the military port. America had several more bombs being prepared and let it be known that Japan would pay dearly for the continuation of this horrendous conflict they started. On August 13 conventional bombing on Japanese cities started up again.

Japan surrendered unconditionally with an announcement on 15 August, 1945, with the formal surrender terms signed on the USS Missouri on September 2, with the stipulation allowed by America that they could keep their Emperor. That was all. One American POW who had been transferred to Japan on one of the Hell Ships years earlier and had endured three years of slave labor and torture under unrelenting brutal conditions; when asked about the atomic bombs dropped on Japan said, "I wish they had dropped four or five more."

U.S. Navy ships racing toward Japan received the word and started to coast. All across the Pacific those slated for the invasion got the news of their lives. Bill Walker, a soldier on one of the islands that still had a few Japanese said, "The Japs came in from the jungle and gave us their swords. Of course the officers got the good ones."

A high ranking American official asked a Japanese official at the time, "Why did you attack us?" The Japanese official replied, "We didn't think you would fight." Dumb.

Years later I was standing near Mamaw Slover, Mom's Mother, when someone said something about the Japanese. She piped up, "I don't like the Japanese. They shot my boys!" Her boys were Uncle Drummond, wounded on Iwo Jima and Uncle Charles, noted earlier being wounded in the Negras Islands.

On VJ Day, August 15, 1945, U.S. President Harry Truman appointed General Douglas MacArthur as Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers to supervise the occupation of Japan. For the next six years the nation of Japan was basically run by American General Douglas Arthur. With full support from the U.S, he helped them write a constitution, form a true representative Parliament, and insured Japanese women voted equally as Japanese men did.

When Pop heard about the Japanese surrender a great weight of duty was lifted off his and his fellow soldiers, generating mountainous relief. However, "We were ready to do whatever was necessary.", he said in relation to if they had had to invade Japan. The war was over, and he and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division soldiers would not now be at the front in the invasion of Japan. His life would now continue without war. He could start his life anew with marriage, career, and family, and Ft. Swift turned into a huge celebration party.

Lola Will Powell, now Lola Will Taylor, was in her house in Lufkin when she heard what she said seemed like every factory, fire whistle, siren, and horn in the city going off at once. Just then her Mother came from across the street into her house. "What's going on?" Lola Will asked. "I think the war's over!" Her Mother answered. Indeed it was. The boys, brothers, sons, husbands, fathers, who had made it through alive would be coming home.

A world wide celebration began, and nowhere more so than in the United States, who had been fighting major wars on two fronts and supplying for years major portions of the supplies to various Allied nations fighting the Axis Powers.

The formal Japanese surrender was signed September 2, 1945 on board the large battleship, the USS Missouri. With exquisite timing, as soon as the signatures were done, two thousand American warplanes, from fighters to bombers, flew low over the crowded ship in a show of American military might.

An American sailor from Lufkin, a young black man, who had served on various ships in various duties in the Pacific during the war, was on board the Missouri and witnessed the historic event. I had met him at a restaurant here in Lufkin, but regret his name is now lost to history.

In Moscow the Soviet Union held a victory parade on August 12, 1945, with athletes from all over the Soviet nation. This was in addition to the military victory parade held June 24, 1945, which lasted two hours in rainy weather. This was a five and a half hour parade. It was overseen by the communist overlords standing atop the Lenin tomb. A special guest was U.S. General Dwight Eisenhower, who appeared as trying to appear civil to these emerging post war adversaries. The parade was mostly women. The men were dead.



### **A young boy clutching new shoes he received in 1947.**

Six-year-old Austrian boy, Werfel, was photographed when he got a new pair of shoes at the Am Himmel orphanage, donated to him by the Junior Red Cross in the United States of America. The photograph was first published in LIFE magazine on December 30, 1946 (on page 22) and later, again, on September 24, 1951 (on page 180). The photograph was shot by Gerald Waller, in 1946, and was titled "New Shoes". The little boy, Werfel, was among the children who were brought to the USA after being deported from Israel / Palestine, where they arrived after liberation from the concentration camps. The shoes he's got on appear worn out and that he's certainly outgrown them. To me Werfel's face epitomizes a new beginning for the Earth.



## Chapter Seventy Four

Dad's youngest sister, Merlene, married a boy from Huntington named Bill Cowart. Bill had been a Navy See Bee in the Pacific. They were the guys who could take a shovel and a knife and in less than a week would have a fully functioning airport with buildings carved out of the jungle, often under enemy fire. When he came back he told Dad about when they were getting ready to return to the states they were told to drive off big Caterpillar dozers into the ocean to get rid of them. Maybe the wear and tear they had gone through with all the salt water exposure made them more of a liability. Bill said it seemed to him more a matter of convenience by the Navy to have the least amount of equipment to deal with. The war was over. They were going home.

As mentioned earlier, Dad's oldest sister Gladys made the Navy a career. In years to come Gladys built a brand new house half a mile from the old house and moved Papaw and Mamaw into it where they lived the rest of their lives.

Mom's youngest sister, Mary, married Moore Floyd from Lufkin. He had been an artillery officer and blasted many a German position. He and Aunt Mary moved to Texas A&M where he finished his degree. Mom's oldest brother, Uncle Drummond Slover, came home to marry a girl he had met at TCU and became a very successful geologist in the oil industry.

Uncle Luearl Kinnaird returned from Europe to Lufkin to his wife, Mom's oldest sister Orell, to go back working at the Southland papermill and raising a family.

John Booker returned to Lufkin to marry Pearl Moore's younger sister Ruby and went to work for the Temple Lumber Company in Diboll.

Lt. Col. Snetzer, now Col. Snetzer, stayed in the Army in the Army Corps of Engineers and oversaw projects all over the United States until he retired.

Mom and Pop returned to Lufkin. She started working as a nurse at Woodland Heights hospital there. This was before a lot of the doctors on duty during the war returned home. Mom did a little of everything at the hospital and during that time oversaw the delivery of 22 babies all by herself. Pop waited on her one evening while she was checking on the delivery of twin boys born to Mr. and Mrs. Allred.



Pop and Mom in Lufkin. He was still in his Army Uniform and she in her Nurse uniform.

Mom and Pop finally in civilian clothes, either right before or after getting married.



Pop also made a visit in Huntington to Mr. and Mrs. J.H. Kannenberg, the parents of Charles Kannenberg, their only child, who was killed in Germany toward the end of the war. Dad brought them an Eisenhower jacket as a remembrance for Charles. It was a dark green, military, close fitting uniform top. Dad visited with them about Charles. He said both parents, especially Mrs. Kannenberg, really appreciated greatly the visit from him and the jacket.

A good friend of Dad's, Bill Knapp, was a graduate of Texas A&M, and had been an infantry company commander during the war. He came back to Lufkin as the Angelina county agriculture agent and got married. The Korean War came, with the military desperate for veteran line officers in that conflict, and got him to reenlist. He served extremely well in Korea, earning the full respect of his men. Toward the end of the war, while still in combat, he got his orders to return home. He was killed in action right after. Mother said it was reported his men filed by his body, not believing their revered commander was gone. His young wife was joyously awaiting his return in the two weeks it would take him to get back to her when she received word. One can only imagine the shock and sorrow. The civilized world looked to America to bare the brunt of freedom's fight. In that conflict American provided 90% of the total UN military forces fighting to keep South Korea free. She later moved out to California, where she met and married a college professor.

General Robertson received his military retirement right after the war. A good job by a good commander well done. Col. Warren, the commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Combat Engineer Battalion had gotten a promotion to Chief of Staff of the 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division after the Battle of the Bulge. The Second Infantry Division went on to become the most decorated division in the Korean War. Twenty of its soldiers were awarded the Medal of Honor during that war.

140 young men, from Angelina County were killed during World War II. Pop remembered well China Havard from down on the Prairie was one of them. He was the older brother to Linwood Havard who also served in the service and was a cousin of Carl Havard. Mom knew many of those killed, and said it was hard sometimes to grasp that they were gone.

A T.T.Gay, a pilot during the war, was lost in the jungle in the Pacific and finally listed as killed in action by the government. He called the History Center in Diboll, Texas years later to affirm he is still alive and kicking. The official records still show 141 from Angelina killed.

Mom and Dad married on November 21, 1945, at the preacher's house, which was a lot less expensive than the church. Pop said when they got married all Mom had to her name was a couple of cardboard suitcases and some nurse uniforms. Their first night on their honeymoon was at the Blackstone hotel in Tyler, Texas, eighty miles north of Lufkin. They continued on to Dallas for a job interview, with IBM, which Dad wound up not taking. He didn't want to be moved every few years as Mom said he was ready to settle down.

The United States emerged from the war as a world power. At war's end America had 6% of the population and was producing 50% of all manufactured goods in the world. From 1946 to 1955 some 75 million babies were born in the U.S., the "Baby Boom". The soldiers, sailors, and airmen came home to settle down and raise families.

In one of the first and largest suburban neighborhoods built in the U.S., Levittstown in New York, named after the man and his sons who conceived the massive housing development, the new look for the wives there was pregnant. All those new homes being built all over America had to have refrigerators, stoves, air conditioners, washing machines, and lots of

building materials. Goods were built and shipped overseas. Jobs were created as never before.

The men came home, the women by and large came out of the factories and offices and went to raising families while the men went to work building America. Many women though, liked their independence and continued to work at careers and getting an education. America also gave of its largess to the world with massive foreign aid to Europe through the Marshall Plan, and foreign aid to the world at large to rebuild from the ravages of such a horrible, widespread conflict. The two greatest enemies of the United States and the wartime Allied powers, Germany and Japan benefited tremendously and went on to become economic powerhouses and bulwarks against the communist Soviet Union and communist China.

Winston Churchill had called the Lend Lease from his 17 April, 1945 House of Commons speech on the death of Franklin Roosevelt, "...The extraordinary measure of assistance called Lend-Lease, which will stand forth as the most unselfish and unsordid financial act of any country in all history." Though there is no clear record of him saying so, I think Mr. Churchill thought the same thing about the Marshall Plan.

The United States and its people, besides the many lives sacrificed and lost in combat to the lifetime sorrow of so many families, had given again and again of themselves, and what their country could offer without payment in return, so many millions across the Earth could eat, live, work, and have the means to fight for their own freedom from tyranny.

All during the war Pop had never weighed more than 145 pounds. The American soldiers weren't supermen but regular Joes, who when they heard the sound of guns seeking to kill them, stood fast, advanced toward the sound of the guns, and did their duty. They were and are forever heroes.

He and his fellow soldiers raised on farms, small towns and large, during the Great Depression, went forth and did what they had to do, completely defeating fanatical peoples, armed to the teeth, determined to rule the world.

Mom had never been outside the state of Texas, so not long after the honeymoon, Dad drove her down to Orange, Texas and across the long, two lane bridge that crossed over the Sabine River into Louisiana. They turned around and came back.

They drove over there in a new Plymouth. Such cars were in short supply right after the ceasing of hostilities but Pop had been able to buy before others from the Gibbs Brothers car dealer as a returning serviceman. Mr. Finas Gibbs told Pop he appreciated him not turning around and selling the car he had just bought for a quick profit as some servicemen did.



Pop standing in front of the first car he ever bought, a brand new Plymouth convertible!

Mom said it took a bit to un-spoil Pop from the little orderly at Camp Swift who had thoroughly spoiled him, of course deservedly so.

Pop had interviewed at Southland Paper Mill in Lufkin. At the time he only had his Army uniforms to wear. Art Drew was the chief engineer of the mill and in the interview directed Pop to show how he should letter on a mechanical drawing. Mr. Drew was a little arrogant when he

ordered Dad to draw and when he looked over what Pop had drawn. Dad had been in the Army four years in tough training and then commanding men in heavy combat for months on end. Now he was being treated like a school boy. The potential pay was pretty good but he didn't like the situation. (Years later Pop and Art Drew became good friends.) So he went to Texas Foundries. Even though the pay was pretty good he didn't like the feel of that place either.

Then he interviewed at Lufkin Foundry and Machine Company. The President, W.C. Trout, interviewed Pop and afterwards sent him down to the head of engineering. Pop was interviewed more and taken through the engineering department. Bayo Hopper took Pop out to lunch and they toured through the plant. Dad had studied mechanical engineering at Texas A&M and this fit in with what all Lufkin Foundry was about. They produced commercial gears, oil field pumping units, and commercial truck trailers. Pop felt totally welcomed and took the job.

He remembered hearing some of the men at the plant saying upon seeing his uniform, "He may be a Major now, but we'll make a private out of him!"

He and Mom had lived in a rent house in Lufkin for five years while Pop worked at the Foundry, and taught shop math and mechanical drawing three nights a week for those years in Lufkin for extra income. The first child, Robert, was born on September 6, 1946. The family with three young boys now, moved to Shawnee Prairie and lived for a year and a half in a little white sharecropper's house on the Prairie that had an outhouse out back.

The house had been built by McKrutch Hales, who had been the main carpenter at the Manning saw mill town. McKrutch moved out to the Prairie and bought thirty acres. Mr. and Mrs. Flournoy lived there for a while. The Flournoys had four boys, and brought into their family later a beautiful girl named Judy. One of the boys was named Robert after Pop, with Mr. Flournoy becoming a well know County businessman and timber farmer.

Papaw bought the house and the land and used it for a time as a sharecropper house. After we lived there Pop's brother Joe and his family lived there for a year and a half after the house they were living in, the old Ward house, had burned and they were building themselves a new house on the same hill.

In the little house water ran under it and we kids played with crawdads in the front yard. Mom said we had colds all winter while living there. I remember it being dark and cold at night during the winter. Mom had us three boys to deal with living there, while Dad worked all week, driving into Lufkin every day, and worked half a day every Saturday.

One morning Dad was headed to work, with Mom and us three little boys with the house with water running under the house and the outhouse in back. Dad said he needed to use the outhouse, but then said, no, he'd wait until he got to the office and could use the office restroom. He said that was about the maddest Mom ever got at him.

They built a house on a hill on the Prairie which had been the old Bud McGee place, and lived there ten years. Not long after moving there Mom and Dad had their fourth child, a little girl. She was and is a sweet, loving, joyful child and person. They named her Joy Dell.



Mom and Pop in front of their new home they built on a hill overlooking Shawnee Prairie. Pop obviously just said something funny that Mom couldn't help but smile about.

Mom and Joy Dell were in the hospital, coming home the next day, so Pop was keeping us three boys that night. Working at Manning, then on the farm with Mamaw cooking, as a cadet at Texas AMC, then training and fighting in the Army, then married with Mom, someone had always cooked meals Pop ate. What to feed the boys? We ate like horses. Rice! He'd seen Mom cook it before. We all liked it and it could make a lot, easily. I remember him there in his boxer shorts and undershirt standing there at the stove. He heated up the water and put in the rice. It didn't seem like enough rice compared to the water. So he added more rice. Soon it didn't seem like enough water, so he added water. Soon there was rice all over the stove, the kitchen, and the floor. But we got fed!

We ran cattle, baled hay, and always had a big garden on the hill where we lived that Mother would can vegetables from all during late summer. It was such a treat to taste vine ripened tomatoes, peas, and vegetables during the cold winter months.

The war left lifetime effects on all who fought it. On some even more so. About twice a summer, especially when cousins from the city visited, Mom and Dad would take all of us to Lake Tejas, about forty miles from the Prairie off the main road to Beaumont near a small town named Colmesneil. The lake was large with a metal water slide, three short wooden platforms out on the water and a two story wooden diving tower. The lake was formed by a highway earthen dam across a spring fed stream forming the lake, so the waters were always clean, clear with being slightly stained by leaf tannin.

Steep, oak tree covered sandy slopes cascaded down to the water. We would swim, then come out to picnic on Vienna sausages and pork and beans out of a can. Mom made us wait a full thirty minutes after eating while we chomped at the bit to get back into the water. At the end of the day Mom and Dad would have to tell us more than once, "Come on, we're leaving, let's go!" We loved going there.

We always saw the maintenance man when we went there. He was ruggedly handsome, tan all over, never wore a shirt, only olive drab Army shorts, a cloth Army cap, and low heel

leather shoes without socks. His skin looked slightly rough as if recovered from something. Rumor had it that he's been a Japanese POW, and his tongue had been cut out in the process of their torturing him. He seemed a kind man, but I never saw him open his mouth, talk to anyone, or smile. The look in his naturally dark eyes would freeze one's blood.

I remember one late evening in the winter in a biting cold rain. We were getting bales of hay out and broken up so the cattle could eat. I looked up at Pop handing out hay from the back of the truck, seeing his face stolid and cheeks burnished red with the wind and rain whipping around him. I remember thinking even then, I wouldn't want to have to face a nation of such men.

We were all getting so involved though with school and work in Lufkin 21 miles away Mom and Pop decided to move back there. Besides, the President of Lufkin Foundry and Machine Company at the time, Walter Trout, had come to the Prairie to talk to Pop about needing to get him living closer to Lufkin Foundry, and Mr. Trout being able to more easily get in touch with Dad, (we were on a party line and sometimes neighbors would break into the conversation).

We moved into Lufkin to live and work. Sleeping in air conditioning was kind of weird at first but we grew use to it. The whole family was busy all year.

When a 16 year old in high school, I happened to be home by myself one afternoon when the phone rang. It was a man named Barryhill from Pennsylvania, Sgt. Barryhill, Pop's jeep driver during the war. He was passing through Lufkin and gave Dad a call. He wasn't staying, just passing through. One of the first things he said when speaking about Pop, "He was a good man in combat." His voice was kind of gravely and seemed to be spoken from some other era and carried a kind of weight when he spoke. He talked briefly, but repeated again as if trying to get me to understand what he was saying. "He was a good man in combat."

Recently I learned from a girl, Judy Pelton, I rode the school bus with from Shawnee Prairie to Huntington, where we would pick her up on the way, her Dad and two uncles were in the service in World War II. Her Father was in the infantry in combat in the Pacific. Another girl, Bonita Simpson's father was in European combat. The basketball coach at the Huntington schools, Mr. Whitten, had been in the U.S. Army in Europe and been captured by the Germans, becoming a POW until liberated. The Citizen Soldiers of the United States went quietly back to their lives all over America.

Pop spent forty years at Lufkin Industries as the name of Lufkin Foundry and Machine Company was later changed to. He spent 17 years on the drawing board designing machinery. He worked his way up to head of gear engineering and one day was called into a meeting of the Board of Directors. He was getting his thoughts together thinking of what they may ask about his engineering area, when they brought him in and announced they were putting him on as a member of the Board. He was the first Director not to come from one of the founding families.

As Pop advanced at Lufkin Industries he was involved in just about every community organization in Angelina County, including serving as President of the Lufkin Chamber of Commerce in getting the Lufkin Exposition Center built, where many venues are held each year including the annual Lufkin Livestock and Rodeo put on by the Lufkin Noon Lions Club, of which he has been an active member for many years. He served on the board of the local hospital, library, banks, savings and loan, Lufkin Country Club, Chairman of the Board of First Christian Church, Director of the Texas A&M Research Foundation, President of the

American Gear Manufacturers Association, a Distinguished Alumni of Texas A&M University, recipient of Who's Who in Texas, plus a 32<sup>nd</sup> Degree Mason, a Director of Texas Utilities of Dallas, member of numerous engineering organizations: also a founder, charter member, and long time board member of Angelina College in Lufkin. His son Robert L. Poland, Jr. continues serving and making major contributions on that board today. There were many other services Pop participated in. He served on the last jury in the stately old courthouse in Lufkin with the beautiful copper dome before it was torn down.

He spent the last twenty years at Lufkin Industries as Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of the Board. He oversaw a tremendous growth and modernization of this now international company that is still headquartered here in Lufkin, Texas. He remembered one of the men there saying that Pop may have started out as a private but wound up a four star general. The company in 2015 was bought by General Electric. Frankly, it was far better run and a much better concern when it was locally owned and operated.

I remember when we lived there in Lufkin during the week Dad would usually come home around 6:00 or 6:30 in the evening after getting off work at five. He would have been to some meeting. Years after I had left home I drove him to Texas A&M for a big banquet. The MC asked that all those previously designated a Distinguished Alumni of Texas A&M to please stand. Pop stood up. That was the only way I found out about that. I asked him, "Pop, why didn't you tell us?" He shrugged his shoulders, spread his hands, and said, "Well..." He was that way about a lot of things over the years he had accomplished. I think it went back to always doing his best at whatever he was doing and getting as far as he could, without embellishment. That was the way he and his generation lived.



## Chapter Seventy Five

Pop remains a gracious, humorous, well read man at 93 years old in Lufkin. Always a gentleman of the first order, he dotes on his many family members and receives continuous adoration from all of them. He can still rattle off his Army serial number 0465888.

Mom passed on at the age of 67 from cancer. All of the nurses she worked with, except one, have died of cancer as of this writing. Back then they used x-rays so often and without the many safeguards they now have. My youngest brother, John, the youngest division manager in the history of Lufkin Industries, was killed at the age of 29 in the Lufkin company plane bringing a load of customers back from Colorado. He left a wife and three young children in the tragedy. Of his forty years at Lufkin Industries Pop said: "I loved every minute of it." Except, he said for those very dark days in losing John.

Since the first printing of this book, my confidant in life, besides Pop, my little sister Joy Dell, due to a long bout with cancer, passed on to a much higher place on March 3, 2012. She has three wonderful children and husband to work with her legacy while she works in Heaven. As her son Robert said when he told me as he struggled to talk, "There's an explosion of Joy in Heaven!"

Pop weathered so many storms in life. I think his upbringing of his early life, the Great Depression, and the war honed his already solid character into a fine, unbreakable granite.

Mom said when he came back from the war he was ready to settle down, though for years he would have nightmares about the combat he had been through. A little over twenty five years later, his oldest son's wife, also told of Robert Jr. having nightmares from the experience of frequent shelling and action from his time in the Vietnam War.

The Second World War I think conveyed to the world's population the great fallacy of having any government that doesn't have systematic checks and balances by the people on those in power exercising that power. This was shown in Nazi German, military rule in Japan, in Stalinist Soviet Union and in the Soviets militarily occupying Eastern Europe for forty five years; and later in the communist party taking over all power in China and the various power centered movements of communism in other countries in the world, North Korea attacking South Korea in 1950, China taking over Tibet by sheer violence in 1950, communist North Vietnam attacking South Vietnam and taking over the South by force. We see this decades long strangle hold on ruling power by the communist party in Cuba. This also of course applies to any dictator with no checks or balances in any country in the world. We have seen this certainly in Africa in the decades since World War II.

The self appointed powers in North Korea and North Vietnam, if they were so adamant about reunification, which they used as a pretext to invade South Korea and South Vietnam, could have held free and fair elections for the peaceful reunification of both North and South Korea and Vietnam. But this would have meant letting the people decide. It would have meant giving the people the power. The communist overlords couldn't have that. They might be voted out of office and power!

The Korean war was started by Kim il-sung with the permission of Stalin and Mao Zedong. When Kim wanted to accept peace terms after one year, Stalin and Mao put an immediate stop to that. Mao furnished millions of "volunteers" to fight in the war in large part to induce the Soviet Union to supply China with massive supplies of weapons and to build out and modernize China's military production industry. Stalin was more than willing to have

Mao do this as Stalin wanted America to be worn down by the specter of American troops being killed by the thousands. He certainly didn't care about the Chinese troops, nor did Mao, as many forced to fight in Korea were former Nationalist Chinese troops, which Mao was happy to be rid of. One million Chinese troops are estimated to have died in Korea.

The same kind of scenario happened when North Vietnam attacked the South. Before that 900,000 North Vietnamese fled to South Vietnam when the communists first took over the north. These Vietnamese people would leave their homes and country to avoid living in the communist "utopia". The same thing happened years later, when North Vietnam took over by force South Vietnam, being massively supplied all those years by the Soviet Union and China in their bid to continually expand communism to further protect their bases of communist domination. Hundreds of thousands of South Vietnamese died escaping to freedom to avoid living under the communist regime. I saw one report right after the communists had overrun the South. It said 200,000 South Vietnamese officials, military, and professionals were taken into the hills and jungles and shot to death.

With this war the North was able to infiltrate their invading soldiers all along the length of South Vietnam, totally ignoring the sovereignty of the countries they invaded through to attack South Vietnam, and used propaganda extensively world wide in helping to overcome any opposition to their conquest. This continual push to other lands was all part of the communist manifesto. In expanding they protect the power base of their doctrine.

As noted earlier on page 120, Lenin said it best in 1905, "If you disagree with us, allow us to put you up against the wall and shoot you." When the provisional government of Russia after the Czar's reign was over in Russia held the first free nation wide election in Russia, Lenin allowed it to go through on 12-14 November 1917 to prove the people really wanted the Bolsheviks in power. They lost in a landslide.

Lenin then cancelled all political parties and individual rights, and took over Russia by force and political manipulation. He formed the Cheka secret police, headed by Felix Dzerzhinsky, to enforce the Bolshevik power grab, sued for peace with Germany, giving up huge amounts of land, peoples and resources to German control, and cancelled all other political parties. He then nationalized the country's industries, banks, and started confiscating privately owned farms. The first six weeks the Bolsheviks were in power from that point the Cheka executed 50,000 people. This was all justified by being done for the sake of the people, in what I call the Big Lie. It was really done in the name of Lenin and the communist masters' grab for power and control over all. We saw this same pattern unfold with Mao ze Dong in China, North Korea, in Eastern Europe with the Soviet military occupation for 45 years, Cambodia, and North Vietnam and Cuba. This continuous expansion was necessary to continue protecting the method of ruling over the people with absolute power with the Big Lie.

This lack of power check is also seen in theocracies, governments ruled by religious leaders, evoking their understanding of power from God is very dangerous. What if someone doesn't agree with them? They invoke anyone disagreeing with them, mortal as they are, as disagreeing with God. We all speak from God in our own individual ways. That's why the founding fathers of the U.S. put separation of church and state into our constitution. They had seen the danger of church centered power in prosecuting and robbing others of their rights. This definitely includes the true equal rights of women on this planet along with each and all men before God. I pray this is one area all over the world where individual rights will

continue to change to full protection of each woman's rights. I see the true, good nature and compassion for others of all men and women on Earth continuing to manifest outwardly.

Adman al-Zawahiri, the current head of al Qaeda, the Islamic terrorist organization, said "I hate democracy!" The clear reason he does is he doesn't want anyone to think for themselves or have the freedom to do so. He wants total control over everyone, just as fascism and modern communism do. For in a democracy he most probably wouldn't have any power at all. Islam has a basic tenet of continual expansion of mortal power over all others not Muslim, with Muslim males the center of personal and culture power. This has to change; when in truth all people before God are always equal, each man, woman, and child. To various degrees in history abuse of power has certainly occurred with other religions also.

We still see today this abuse of power currently in Russia where Vladimir Putin has fixed the political system there to where he has long term tenure. He basically kills, exiles, or imprisons anyone that possibly threatens his power and his penchant for spreading the hegemony of Russia. The same with Xi Jinping, the leader of the communist party in China. Both nations and their people could do so much good on this planet with their energies geared to doing good for every man, woman, and child. Yes, the U.S. certainly is not perfect, certainly not in our history, but where would the world be without the true democratic-republic pattern of government? For many years we have been having an immigration problem because so many people want to come here and live under our system, and the tremendous opportunities freedom, respect for and the protection of an individual's rights offers.

All during the Second World War, Mao Tse-Tung through ruthless manipulation, murder, lies, and even sharing intelligence with the invading Japanese about the Chinese Nationalist Army, managed to emerge with the Chinese Communist Party in power in China. He was massively helped by the Soviet Union. At the Japanese surrender Russia continued moving into Manchuria, pressing on for several weeks hundreds of kilometers into China, confiscating large industrial plants and turning Nationalist soldiers into CCP Army soldiers.

During the war Mao starting in 1942 for two years, in the best agriculture land in Yanan Province, also had the communists grow large amounts of opium to get cash to fund his communist movements.

During eight years of war the CCP, through Mao's tutelage, the CCP Army was maneuvered to where it rarely initiated any action against the occupying Japanese, being used mainly to further the CCP's and thus Mao's power base. The CCP Army only mounted one major attack against the Japanese that Mao had ordered against, but that a lone commander named Peng De-huai had gone ahead and successfully carried out against the Japanese transport systems in Northern China.

After the Japanese surrender, after eight years of war and fourteen in some places of China, particularly Manchuria, the Chinese people were crying for peace, but they got civil war as Mao, with Russia's help mounted what he had wanted all along, total power over all of China and its people. The world is still dealing with that China emerging hegemony today.

We saw this dictatorial effect to a horrible extent in Cambodia with Pol Pot, (trained in China in the 1950's), head of the Khmer Rouge communist group. They murdered and tortured to death two million of their own countrymen out of a population of nine million in forcing into total submission everyone to their extreme control of communism. At a Third World Conference in Peru in 1977 a reporter asked Pot why the Khmer Rouge treated their own people so, Pot answered, "Why are you concerned about enemies of the state?"

Though I wish there were no use for any guns in the world, I think if the Polish, Hungarian, Czechoslovakian, German, French, and other Jewish nationalities, plus Polish and other citizens brutally cast out of their homes during World War II had been armed as Americans commonly are, the outcome might have been a whole lot different.

Also, the German mill manager told of on page 189, where he dug his large signet ring and fingers bloodily into the face of the poor girl in Gerda Weiss' group; had started doing that here in Texas, he would have immediately been beaten to a pulp or shot.

Once I was talking to a staff member at the United States Holocaust Center in Washington D.C. and we got to talking about Pop's service in Europe during World War II. She said, "Oh, he's one of the Liberators." For some reason I had never heard him referred to like that.

In the entire world today there is only a total estimate of just over fifteen million Jewish people. The goal of the Holocaust Center is to not only highlight the Holocaust and genocide that occurred during World War II, but to expose those since still occurring on Earth, such as in Darfur in Africa, Rwanda in Africa, the Rohingya in Myanmar, against the Yasdi in Syria by ISIS, Sadam Hussin against his own people and the last several years that which has occurred under the Assad regime in Syria.

I will add to this list is the little publicized genocide that took place when China took over Tibet by force in October 1950. Over 700,000 totally innocent Tibetan monks were murdered with 6000 monasteries destroyed. Many of the monks were simply beaten to death by Chinese army troops. I saw an actual film of one of these tragedies taking place inside a monastery at the time in Tibet. The film had been secretly taken and secreted out. It was one of horror.

The Center in Washington has set up a large room showing the stories and pictures of many victims, over 55,000 to date, fellow Syrians that were tortured to death by Assad's regime.

Now, he can say he is fighting some very radical Islamic groups, not just ISIS, but groups such as the al-Nusra Front and Ahrar al-Sham. But there is no excuse for these many thousands of tortured deaths and additional indiscriminate killing of civilians earlier in non-government controlled areas by barrel bombs and other major weapons. Assad's regime's main supporters, Russia and Iran, don't care about the regime's genocide.

This goes back to Assad not wanting any systematic check and balance on his government by the people of Syria.

The Holocaust Center's goal is to continue emphasizing such actions against people the world over until there is no longer such occurrences anywhere on Earth, ever.

The United States in its history and formation created tragedies with the native Americans, as did the earlier Spanish explorers. The native Americans were fighting among the many tribes long before European explorers and settlers came. They took great pride in their warrior culture and in putting captives through prolong and varied, terrible tortures. I have read several of these actual first hand accounts and they are accounts of depraved horror.

But new diseases for which they had no immunity wiped out many tribes and there is no excuse for the subsequent treatment of them by the new immigrants and U.S. government in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, especially so as an example the Cherokee people. The other tragedy in the U.S. was with black slaves brought from Africa. All slavery should

have been abolished when the U.S. was first formed and our Constitution ratified. Which, we fought a massive internal war to get the slaves their rightful freedom. President Truman in July 1948 fully integrated all branches of the U.S. Military. Such ramifications are still being played out today here and world wide where each person's responsibility for themselves and their actions, each person's ancestral race, each gender – especially each woman and child here and the world over will have full, total, equal rights that everyone else has before the world and before God. Maybe it won't be totally implemented everywhere before the Second Coming, but it is paramount to head toward that goal from now on. The time has come.

The time has come for wars and conflicts to end on this beautiful Earth. Mostly, if not always, these are due to an abuse of power over others by one or both parties to any conflict.

After an earlier printing of this book, Pop moved on to a hugely rewarding life in God on October 28, 2013 at the age of 94 and a half years. He remained alert and humorous until he moved on while surrounded by family.

A week or so before he passed, I had brought his special friend of the last several years, Lola Will Taylor, over to visit. She had spent seven of her early years growing up in Manning. Pop was sitting in his easy chair with Lola Will sitting in a chair beside him visiting. He was squirming a bit and I asked if I could put a pillow under him. He said that would be great. As I placed it under him I told him it was the one I slept on. He asked, "This won't make me bald, will it?" I'm pretty bereft of hair.

A week or so before he passed I had him up in his chair. I was in the kitchen banging dishes and pans around, I thought he was kind of out of it at the time. He hollered, "Save the pieces!" Through all his physical trials he always, without fail, was gracious, kind and consistently and sincerely thanked anyone who did anything, even the smallest thing for him, from nurses in the hospital, to the ladies who cared for him at times during the weekdays, to myself and other relatives. He was always a delight and privilege to be around. For months at night I could hear him singing the old songs he loved so well. The last day he said what he called his father, "Papa", a few times, and said Mom's name, Adell, several times. I had felt Joy Dell waiting on him for months. We miss him greatly.

In the last couple of decades, my uncles who had served in World War II, most in heavy combat like Pop, have passed away. The year, 2013, saw two aunts passed away in May, one was Pop's sister, and her husband passed away in June of 2013. Her husband had served in the Army in Korea. The Greatest Generation is moving on.

The old saw mill town of Manning and its people, the town now long gone and most of the people gone on surely to a far better place, remained always a special group of memories in his heart. Shawnee Prairie also remains an area of land of which Pop remains a special part to this day.

To everyone on Earth, to every precious life, the words of Sigmund Jucker ring loudly, "Just because to be free. And nobody can imagine what that means to be free."

To all the men in uniform of World War II, to every man and woman who served in all capacities, thanks be to God you were there and stepped up without hesitation when America and the whole world needed you. You were the Generation who didn't give excuses and never considered such. To the Greatest Generation who literally saved our world, and came home and built America into the great nation it has been for the past seventy four years, and established it for future generations, to each of you I give my forever thanks.

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